

Introduction

Gill Partington and Adam Smyth

Book shredding is difficult to watch. Not in the sense that it is uncomfortable – although some may find it so, and such feelings of discomfort are one starting point for this volume. Mainly, however, it is difficult to watch because no one will let you see it. There is something secretive and hidden about this process. Our visit to a book pulping plant in the Midlands takes almost a year to arrange: we are granted an interview only after protracted negotiations, a series of deferrals and cancellations, and a set of provisos. We are not allowed to name the plant, specify its location, or name the manager who, seated opposite us in a bare, bleak office, and with the constant background din of next door's shredding machines, tells us we are lucky to be here. Some years ago a national newspaper wanted an article and pictures. When he refused they hovered above the plant in a helicopter taking tele-photo snaps. The plant is strategically unkempt to keep away visitors. 'Nobody knows what it is,' he says. Partly the secrecy is cold, hard, business sense. Books need to be destroyed or the market would collapse: returns or surplus stock can't leak out to be resold, so leftovers have to be shredded securely. A 'Certificate of Destruction' proves the items no longer exist. But there other reasons, too, unspoken but palpable. Our visit is treated with caution because the deliberate destruction of books is a delicate issue. Publishers have their image to protect.

He speaks with animation about the world of 'destruction work'. He has no interest in the literary content of books – 'Can't read them. They send me to sleep' – but talks knowledgeably about their raw material. He knows paper inside out. He understands its inner workings, its complex variations of weight, grade and texture. He knows how it is made and unmade; holding it up to the light he can show how the fibres in a sheet of notepaper bind it together; he can tell by its taste

2 *Adam Smyth and Gill Partington*

1 if a banknote is made of genuine Cypriot white virgin pulp, and he
 2 can talk at length about the construction and coatings of a cardboard
 3 box. In the shredding plant, what matters is matter itself. In the bins
 4 of books spending their final minutes of existence, the usual currency
 5 of literature – content, plotline, character, style – no longer signify. To
 6 the outsider, the novelty may lie in spotting familiar authors or titles
 7 and feeling the slight frisson as the big names – Jeffrey Archer, David
 8 Baldacci, C. J. Samson, Tony Robinson – disappear into the noisy teeth
 9 of the shredder. But these books are not here to be read. A handful of
 10 workers in fluorescent jackets stand at tables, intently picking and sepa-
 11 rating, removing staples from office waste, filleting the innards of hard-
 12 backs, separating white from non-white pages. What demarcates these
 13 books isn't any kind of conventional criteria of literary judgement. The
 14 sorting process is careful and expert, but isn't to do with what's printed
 15 in them. This is a place where people look at books with different eyes,
 16 not reading but grading, looking through the print to what is under-
 17 neath. There's a complex caste system: white letter grade, mechanical,
 18 multi-grade, cardboard, then the lowest of the low: an abject pile of 'wet
 19 strength tissue'.

20 Confetti rains down from the shredding machines. Strewn every-
 21 where on the floor is a babel of printed scraps: a non-stop factory of
 22 literary recombination and experimentation. Pressed tight into 650 kilo
 23 bales and stacked ready for delivery to paper mills, they are huge three-
 24 dimensional cut-up poems, only their surfaces of tiny orphaned frag-
 25 ments legible. We might think of the book as an object elevated above
 26 other objects: we probably accord it a certain respect. We handle it
 27 carefully, even reverentially, as we browse, fondle or covet in the book-
 28 shop. But here, books know their place: they are part of a wider ecology
 29 of destruction, recomposition and miscegenation. Books; cardboard;
 30 toilet paper; office waste; files; receipts; and in a second warehouse
 31 next door the non-paper waste: crates of bicycles; video cassettes. The
 32 plant accepts Zimmer frames from Health Authorities, crushing 200 to
 33 produce a ton of aluminium. The shredder is powerful, omnivorous,
 34 indiscriminate. The baling machine, too. The foreman raises his right
 35 hand with some pride to show where the baler snapped off his thumb
 36 seven years ago. He had it stitched back on but it doesn't move. 'You've
 37 got to respect these machines at the end of the day.' More gruesome is
 38 the story of a worker in another plant, down south. Working alone at
 39 lunch he tumbled into the baler along with the shredded paper to reach
 40 a grizzly rectangular end. These are places where boundaries erode and
 41 disappear; not just boundaries between texts, but between things in

1 general. Everything, it seems, is fibrous pulp to be manufactured into
2 something else. Used nappies are found in the DNA of ceiling tiles.
3 Scraps of Jeffrey Archer could become a *Wisdom for the Ages*, and a com-
4 puter manual could become Jeffrey Archer. And in the Ovidian lottery
5 of paper reincarnation, pretty much anything could end up as a lottery
6 ticket (Figures 0.1 and 0.2).

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8 * * *



Figure 0.1 (Photo: MacMillan)

1 In the business of books, production and destruction are linked. Their
 2 shredding and pulping on a mass scale is a fact of life. Tens of thousands
 3 of books meet this fate every week in the UK alone; the equivalent of
 4 a small library. But, expressed in these terms, the reasons for the aura
 5 of secrecy surrounding 'destruction work' start to become apparent.
 6 The spectacle of industrial shredding brings to light some awkward
 7 paradoxes. We have investments in the written word as a lasting
 8 monument, yet its deliberate destruction is routine and even necessary.
 9 Books are two-faced: on the one hand they are totems: carriers of cul-
 10 ture, values, beliefs. But on the other hand they are quotidian objects:
 11 material and ephemeral things, subject to decay and physical obsoles-
 12 cence like any other. We weigh them down with significance out of
 13 all proportion to their flimsy paper and cardboard construction. Their
 14 destruction, too, is a material fact that is overloaded with symbolism.
 15 It provokes unease, sometimes outrage or anger; even in some cases,
 16 violence. In 2010, when the Florida Baptist preacher Pastor Terry Jones
 17 announced his intention to burn 200 copies of the Quran, he provoked
 18 a major international incident. The threat, though not executed, was
 19 condemned by Hillary Clinton as a 'disgraceful, disrespectful act' and
 20 was considered grave enough to warrant a personal intervention from
 21 President Obama. A year later, Jones set fire to a single copy of the
 22 Muslim holy book, sparking riots in Mazar-I-Sharif, Afghanistan, in
 23 which a UN compound was overrun and twelve were killed.¹ Deaths
 24 resulted also from reports that the Quran was put down a latrine by
 25 interrogators at Guantanamo Bay. The reports, in *Newsweek* magazine,
 26 turned out to be false, but at least 15 died in several days of rioting in
 27 Afghanistan, Pakistan, India and Indonesia.² The desecration – or even
 28 threatened desecration – of sacred texts has become a recurrent flash-
 29 point in the religiously charged context of the so-called 'war on terror'.
 30 The destruction of secular books, too, can produce extreme reactions.
 31 Protests against Salman Rushdie's novel *The Satanic Verses* had been
 32 vocal but largely ignored immediately following the book's publication.
 33 But in January 1989, when a single copy was destroyed in front of TV
 34 cameras on the streets of Bradford, it prompted a frenzy of indignation
 35 in the press and media, and heated debates about free speech, multicul-
 36 turalism and censorship. Anthony Burgess, writing in the *Daily Mail*,
 37 condemned such 'barbarous rituals', warning the protesters to heed
 38 the 'prophetic words' of the German poet Heinrich Heine: 'If you burn
 39 books, you will soon be burning men and women.'³ Burgess's com-
 40 ments point in two directions. On the one hand what concerns him is
 41 book destruction as culturally backward, atavistic and barbaric, while

1 on the other he draws parallels with a European context. The image
2 of a book in flames is an ominous sign because of its resonances with
3 Hitler's Germany in the 1930s. This rhetorical move seems an almost
4 universal response to the burning of books. The incineration of copies
5 of Kurt Vonnegut's *Slaughterhouse Five* in Drake, North Dakota in 1973,
6 on the order of a conservative school board, was condemned by one
7 local newspaper as a re-enactment of 'the Nazis' obscene book-burning
8 orgies in pre-World War II Germany'.⁴ The burning of *Harry Potter* novels
9 in a 'holy bonfire' in Almagordo, New Mexico was attended by protest-
10 ers waving placards comparing the perpetrators to Hitler. And a women's
11 refuge in north-east England were pilloried in the press after announc-
12 ing their intention to burn the erotic novel *Fifty Shades of Grey* for its
13 endorsement of violence against women. Headlines drew direct compari-
14 sons with '1930s Germany'.⁵

15 Hovering inescapably in the background whenever books are burned
16 is the spectre of the book pyres in Berlin's Opernplatz in 1933. On 10
17 May that year some 40,000 people, including propaganda minister Josef
18 Goebbels, gathered to watch as truckloads of 'decadent', 'un-German'
19 books were burned by National Socialist students. Opernplatz, rechrist-
20 ened Bebelplatz, is today an open air memorial to the conflagration. A
21 glass hatch set in the cobbled pavement reveals Micha Ullman's ghostly
22 subterranean monument of empty bookshelves. Close by, rendered in
23 bronze, are the words of warning paraphrased by Anthony Burgess,
24 taken from Heinrich Heine's 1821 play, *Almansor*: 'Das war ein Vorspiel
25 nur, dort wo man Bücher verbrennt, verbrennt man am Ende auch
26 Menschen' ('That was merely a prelude: Where they burn books, they
27 will ultimately burn people'). Bebelplatz bears witness not only to the
28 acts of the National Socialists, but also to our cultural investments in
29 the book. Given the scale of human suffering and death under the
30 Nazis, a solemn moment to the destruction of inanimate objects seems
31 in principle a strange gesture; disrespectful, even. But books are differ-
32 ent. Heine's epigram underlines the fact that this is a monument to
33 what have now become known as 'the Nazi Book Burnings', but simul-
34 taneously to the Holocaust itself. In other words, it indicates the extent
35 to which the destruction of books is commemorated as an integral part
36 of the Nazi programme itself, the eradication of knowledge and ideas
37 anticipating and even facilitating an attempted eradication of whole
38 segments of society and culture.

39 Modern history's most iconic and infamous episode of book destruc-
40 tion has come to define the terms on which we see all others. But this
41 automatic triangulation of Nazism, censorship and the burning of

1 the written word was a retrospective construction. Matthew Fishburn
2 shows that initial news coverage of the burnings reveals an interna-
3 tional reaction of bemusement rather than outrage. They were quickly
4 forgotten, 'dismissed as a some sort of excessive college prank or sat-
5 urnalialia'.⁶ The concept of book burning lacked its current immediate
6 associations with political repression. Conversely, in the inter-war
7 period it was a common trope in the writings of intellectuals eager to
8 break with the burden of literary tradition, gesturing towards libera-
9 tion rather than censorship. It carried a range of potential meanings,
10 but 'this diversity has been elided in more recent history, replaced with
11 a sanitized version which imagines that book burning was instantly
12 recognised as the emblem of fascism'.⁷ In fact, Fishburn argues, it
13 wasn't until nearly a decade after the conflagration in Berlin that the
14 link between book destruction and fascism began to be cemented. It
15 became a key facet of Allied propaganda, and the marker of a barbaric
16 enemy. George Orwell, in his wartime speeches, called book burning
17 'the most characteristic activity of the Nazis'.⁸ America propaganda
18 films, meanwhile, made much of the burnings. MGM's 1940 film *This*
19 *Mortal Storm* featured a set-piece based on the already familiar newsreel
20 footage of the Opernplatz burnings.⁹ Disney's *Education for Death*, a
21 children's film made in 1943, had its evil Nazis burning the Talmud,
22 the Koran, Shakespeare and the Bible, none of which made it onto the
23 actual Berlin bonfires.¹⁰

24 In the post-war decades it came to denote an affront to liberal, enlight-
25 ened values. Orwell's *1984* has censored writings cast into the furnace
26 of the 'memory hole'. And Ray Bradbury, wanting to conjure a vision of
27 a nightmarish future, chose book burning as the ultimate dystopian
28 motif. His 1953 novel, *Fahrenheit 451*, reflects various post-war anxie-
29 ties: the threat to liberty and free speech from McCarthyism and com-
30 munism, and the erosion of literature by popular culture. Yet these
31 diverse threats are given simultaneous expression in the burning of
32 books. Easily packaged as both a Cold War-friendly message about indi-
33 vidual liberty and as a humanist polemic about the value of reading,
34 Bradbury's novel was quickly established as a fixture of the American
35 High School Literature curriculum, and brandished over subsequent
36 decades as a mobile and adaptable emblem of the dangers of censorship
37 and cultural vandalism more broadly. It reflected as well as perpetu-
38 ated the notion of book destruction as metonymic violence. A decade
39 later, François Truffaut's film adaptation of the novel made much of the
40 visual iconography of totalitarianism. With its sinister black-uniformed
41 'firemen' ransacking homes and incinerating libraries, Truffaut's film

1 demonstrates the cultural legibility of book burning as a shorthand for
2 philistinism, intolerance and repression.

3 It has become a particularly ethically charged act. Heine's lines,
4 engraved at book destruction's ground zero, Bebelplatz, predate National
5 Socialism by more than a century, but they are now indivisibly associ-
6 ated with the Nazi burnings. By extension, they have become something
7 of a solemn mantra, invoked whenever the written word is threatened.
8 Those researching incidents of book destruction will find it more or less
9 everywhere they look, repeated with wearisome regularity. And its logic,
10 linking the fate of books with the fate of human beings, goes largely
11 unquestioned. It implies not just an inevitability – the destruction of
12 one will lead to the destruction of the other – but a kind of continuity
13 and even a moral equivalence: the one is part of the other. It seems that
14 book destruction has become so inextricably linked with brutality, that
15 we think of it as an act of brutality in itself.

16 This coupling has of course a long history: in *Areopagitica* (1644), John
17 Milton declared 'as good almost kill a Man as kill a good Book; who kills
18 a Man kills a reasonable creature, Gods Image; but hee who destroyes
19 a good Booke, kills reason it selfe, kills the Image of God'.¹¹ But the
20 link between book destruction, murder and political repression became
21 particularly dominant in the second half of the twentieth century. The
22 sentiment is one Ray Bradbury makes explicit in the 1967 introduction to
23 his novel: 'when Hitler burned a book I felt it as keenly, please forgive me,
24 as his killing a human, for in the long sum of history they are one in the
25 same flesh'.¹² A similar belief seems to underlie Rebecca Knuth's term 'lib-
26 ricide', which yokes together the pillaging of libraries with regime-spon-
27 sored acts of genocide.¹³ The two are continuous, she argues, in her recent
28 studies of politically motivated book destruction. Books are weapons in
29 an ongoing conflict in which the stakes are high: 'The history of mod-
30 ern book and library destruction is one of a collision between liberal
31 humanists and extremists.'¹⁴ The lines are drawn between defenders of
32 the book and those who seek to destroy it.

33 But there is another story to be told here, lost among such overheated
34 rhetoric. The dominance of this narrative which links book destruction
35 with the violation of 'civilization itself', and which describes (and also
36 often prescribes) a sense of 'deep emotion ... sadness and fear' clouds out
37 other ways of thinking.¹⁵ This collection of essays brings to light myriad
38 contexts in which books have been torn, cut, burned, erased, pulped,
39 repurposed, adapted and reshaped. It suggests that the destruction of
40 books has historically been widespread and varied, its motivations com-
41 plex, and its ethics far from black and white. It has not solely been the

1 preserve of religious zealots and repressive governments, and nor has
2 it inevitably connoted violence or aggression. The chapters in this vol-
3 ume draw connections instead between book destruction and creativity,
4 and uncover a wide range of practices, undertaken in diverse contexts
5 and for different ends. A surprising new picture emerges of a vibrant
6 alternative history and taxonomy, providing an important corrective to
7 conventional assessments which only lament destruction as creativity's
8 dark opposite.

9 Much attention has been given in recent years to what Leah Price
10 calls the 'material affordances' of books. Price's own *How to Do Things*
11 *with Books* is something of a recent landmark in this field, addressing
12 the multitude of unexpected uses to which the printed word has histori-
13 cally been put.¹⁶ She demonstrates how the Victorian book was used as
14 trophy, tool, and furniture, focusing on what readers did with printed
15 objects as well as – or instead of – reading them. The material turn, tak-
16 ing place at the intersection of book history and literary scholarship, has
17 opened up a number of other new perspectives on the written text.¹⁷
18 Attention has shifted to paratext and margins, as scholars decode read-
19 erly marginalia as signs of material use.¹⁸ The physical book has been
20 approached through its manufacture, trade, circulation, its commodifi-
21 cation and concomitant anxieties.¹⁹ The interrelations of the book and
22 the gendered, medicalised reading body have been explored, as has the
23 impact of the closets, railway carriages and libraries that transformed
24 the physical spaces readers occupied.²⁰ From a German perspective,
25 literature has been situated as part of a wider 'discourse network' of writ-
26 ing technologies, bureaucratic paperwork, card catalogues and postal
27 systems.²¹ And in perhaps the ultimate material gesture, critics have
28 looked beneath the print, to the papery substrate of books.²² Far from
29 heralding the end of the book the digital era has meant, for scholarship
30 at least, its noticeable, insistent and vividly embodied reappearance.

31 Yet its destruction has been, until now, largely uncharted territory,
32 and this significant aspect of the material life of the book has thus been
33 omitted from the account. Modes of book destruction are as varied and
34 fascinating as its production and circulation. The book's misuse can be
35 as enlightening as its use. Destruction is a unique moment when the
36 boundaries around the book become especially permeable and dissolve
37 entirely; when it transforms itself into matter, is recycled into another
38 book, or becomes some other kind of object. It is a moment when the
39 complex nature of the book becomes especially visible, and when the
40 fraught relationship between its insides and outside – its materiality
41 and its semiotic content – is most urgently felt. Beyond this, however,

1 there are still more far-reaching issues of disciplinary perspective and
 2 theory. Work in the Humanities in past decades has centred around the
 3 authority of the printed word. A pervasive Foucauldian literary history
 4 has seen the library as a nexus of power, an archive of medical, legal
 5 discourses that have the capacity to shape and discipline selfhood and
 6 thought. Roger Chartier's influential concept of an 'order of books' simi-
 7 larly designates not only the way in which books come to be organised,
 8 but the role they in turn play in organising and codifying systems of
 9 discourse.²³ The making of books and knowledge is linked. But what
 10 of un-making? Books are not always treated with reverence or respect,
 11 as emblems of cultural authority, after all. Often they are treated with
 12 disregard, carelessness or violence. How might these instances impact
 13 on existing paradigms of knowledge, power and subjectivity?

14 Looking back to the medieval and early modern period, this collec-
 15 tion uncovers books routinely scribbled on and scattered, lining pie
 16 dishes and wrapping vegetables, suggesting that the book might be
 17 something quite different to the stable, coherent textual object that we
 18 now take for granted. In subsequent centuries, any putative monolithic
 19 'order of books' is constantly undercut by both the reality and repre-
 20 sentation of the book's ephemerality, its physical disintegration into
 21 waste matter. The essays in this volume trace not only this rich cultural
 22 history, but also address an increasingly widespread strain of art practice
 23 based on the creative transformations of the book. The digital age in
 24 particular seems to have generated a renewed fascination with the book
 25 as a material object to be adapted, reshaped and physically modified.
 26 The collection engages with the lively field of contemporary book art
 27 through interviews with three leading practitioners, as well as an arti-
 28 cle on the aesthetics and ethics of the 'altered book'. It seems that we
 29 are witnessing, if not a renaissance of the book itself, then certainly a
 30 renaissance of book destruction.

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 34 The five sections in this collection each present paradigmatic mecha-
 35 nisms of destruction: 'Burning'; 'Mutilating'; 'Doctoring'; 'Degrading';
 36 and 'Deforming/Reshaping'. The volume opens with that most cul-
 37 turally recognisable episode: the Nazi burnings of 'degenerate' texts.
 38 However, Heike Bauer's chapter uncovers an unexpected ambivalence
 39 to the burnings, linked to a transnational discourse of homophobia.
 40 She focuses on the Institute of Sexual Sciences in Berlin, established by
 41 Jewish homosexual rights campaigner and trained physician Magnus

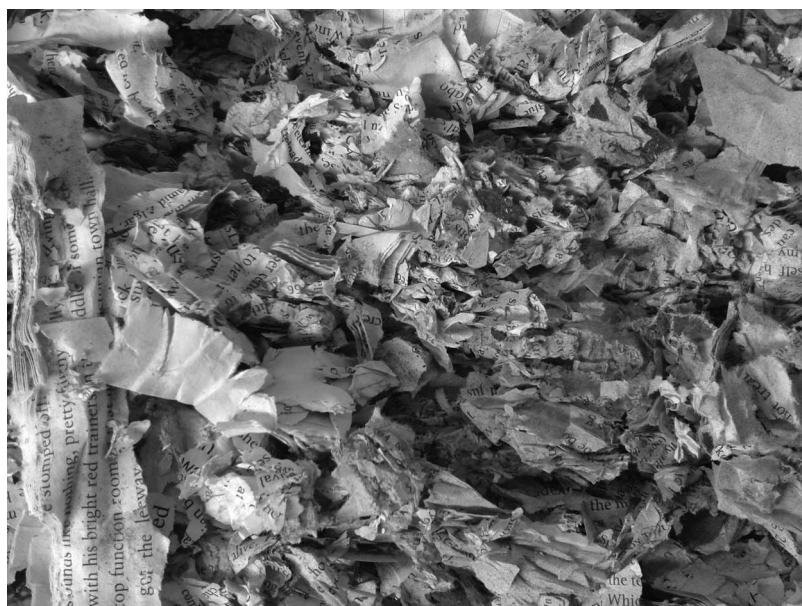


Figure 0.2 (photo: Gill Partington)

Hirschfeld. Central to the establishment of modern sexology, the Institute was a prime target for Nazi attack, and in May 1933, its books were set alight on Berlin's opera square. Bauer retraces these events and considers their Anglo-American responses, showing that debates about books, homosexuality and destruction were closely aligned for many commentators, who overtly associated Hirschfeld's work with his own homosexuality in discursive bids that effectively dismissed his contributions and implicitly condoned their obliteration. Adam Smyth, too reveals some unexpected attitudes to the burning of books. He considers the productive, rather than destructive, place of conflagration in early modern writing and reading, using the accidental burning of Ben Jonson's treasured library as a starting point. Jonson's response was to commemorate this loss with more writing. But if his lost works-in-progress live on in his verse, perhaps more richly than they ever did in reality, it is partly because early modern literary culture often posited a connection between destruction and literary excellence. Good writing was a burning away of bad texts, and to read well was to produce textual loss. Destruction was writing's (often silent) partner.

1 Gill Partington and Ross Birrell address in different ways the mutila-
 2 tion and violent treatment of the written word. Both resist the tendency
 3 to see brutality towards books as a symbolic attack on culture itself, and
 4 instead explore its meanings as a mode of artistic practice. Partington
 5 examines the work of the radical British artist John Latham, whose
 6 career was a sustained attack on the book, astonishing in its range of
 7 methods, from burning to cutting and chewing. She situates these acts
 8 firstly in the framework of Latham's theories of time, event and percep-
 9 tion, and secondly in a technological context. Latham's real interest was
 10 in the book's place in a changing media ecology, and its collision with
 11 film. Glasgow-based artist Ross Birrell is similarly diverse in his modes
 12 of book mutilation, which include burning, sawing in half, grating and
 13 throwing books into the sea. His work explores the relationship, and the
 14 tension, between book destruction as symbol, and as literal act. How
 15 does the bathos of actual book burning – which is difficult, slow, often
 16 unspectacular – complicate the intense cultural taboo of the burnt book,
 17 for instance? What happens to this potent symbolism of the destroyed
 18 book when we try to enact that destruction?

19 Anthony Bale and Tom Phillips both reflect on defacing the page
 20 as a productive rather than destructive impulse. Bale examines a late
 21 fifteenth-century manuscript doctored by one Dorothy Helbarton,
 22 an early sixteenth-century owner of the book. Bale argues that these
 23 inscriptions stage a remarkable attempt at defacing the book in order to
 24 foreground its pragmatic, material worth, as opposed to the intellectual
 25 and antiquarian worth of the book as indicated by other owners. Her
 26 attempts to mark and damage the book reflect an urge to lay claim to
 27 it but they also change the nature of the book by distracting the reader
 28 from the body-text to the parallel narrative of ownership in the margins.
 29 Helbarton's ludic mini-narrative exists alongside the main text, antici-
 30 pating in many ways the work of Tom Phillips, a writer and artist who
 31 has created a new work out of doctoring an existing novel. For nearly
 32 50 years, Phillips has been overwriting and illustrating the pages of W.
 33 H. Mallock's once-obscure Victorian melodrama, *A Human Document*,
 34 obscuring the majority of the text to leave visible a trickle of words. In
 35 the process he has constructed a new narrative entirely; a form of liter-
 36 ary composition based on the act of erasing text. In this wide-ranging
 37 and often hilarious interview, Phillips discusses the production of
 38 *A Humument*, his ongoing dialogue with Mallock, and the relationship
 39 between defacement, destruction and creativity in his work.

40 Chapters by Stephen Colclough and Heather Tilley consider the
 41 degradation of the book through its usage, its rough treatment at the

1 hands of both over-enthusiastic readers and under-enthusiastic ones.
 2 Colclough looks firstly at book abuse in Thackeray's *Vanity Fair* and
 3 Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights*, suggesting that as the novel took on
 4 new cultural power in the mid-Victorian period, authors increasingly
 5 imagined the readerly abuse of reference works and theological texts. In
 6 part, this desecration of authoritative texts symbolises the triumph of
 7 the novel over more respectable genres, but it also reveals deep-seated
 8 authorial anxieties about obedience. Colclough links this to a further
 9 set of cultural anxieties surrounding the ephemeral nature of con-
 10 temporary culture, and the way that popular novels of Mudie's circulating
 11 library were frequently 'read to death'. More attention needs to be
 12 paid to popular objects that have failed to reach traditional research
 13 archives because they were often 'read to death' by their first audience.
 14 Heather Tilley also addresses the theme of ephemerality and Victorian
 15 print culture, through the motifs of book production in Dickens's *Our*
 16 *Mutual Friend*. The novel is preoccupied both with reading and with the
 17 impermanency of the material world, she argues, but whilst its recurrent
 18 scenes of burial and waste have clearly lent themselves to psychoana-
 19 lytic readings, she focuses instead on how they connect with con-
 20 temporary practices of dealing with the surplus of unwanted books, via
 21 either disposal or selling as recyclable material. Such practices suggest
 22 a complex relationship between literary value and material form, with
 23 novels turned to waste paper or even manure as tastes waned. Contrary
 24 to the plenitude of its own publishing mode, the scenes of decomposi-
 25 tion which haunt Dickens's novel testify to a preoccupation with the
 26 issue of literary survival and degeneration.

27 Kate Flint and Nicola Dale provide an appropriate end point for this
 28 volume, suggesting the overlap between book destruction and a surpris-
 29 ing kind of recycling. Both reflect in differing ways on the repurposing
 30 and reshaping of books into new forms. In 'The Aesthetics of Book
 31 Destruction', Kate Flint begins by discussing why photographs of dam-
 32 aged books are not only powerful, and can shock with their wanton
 33 destruction of all that a book symbolises, but can also give pleasure.
 34 Flint considers such images in connection with the aesthetics of ruina-
 35 tion, and the connections between ruins and apocalypse. This anxiety –
 36 that books may be an endangered form – is also expressed in the work of
 37 contemporary artists who seek to explore the cultural meanings of the
 38 book, and expand its potential as an object. She discusses the work of a
 39 number of practitioners from the United States and Britain, suggesting
 40 that the appeal of these creatively destroyed books may be approached
 41 through what Svetlana Boym terms a 'critical ruin gaze', one that looks

not to the past, but to the future. Nicola Dale is one such book artist, whose delicate works are made by painstakingly slicing and sculpting intricate forms from old books. In her works the book assumes striking new shapes, but the original text often remains partially legible, so that the result both is, and yet is no longer, a book. Dale's work seems to play ingeniously with the boundary between destruction and creation, and also that between book and sculpture, inviting speculation about what distinguishes the two. In this interview, she elaborates on the practical processes involved in producing her 'altered books', as well as the wider implications of transforming book into art object.

Notes

1. Enayat Najafizada and Rod Nordland, 'Afghans Avenge Florida Koran Burning, Killing 12', *The New York Times*, 1 April 2011, section World / Asia Pacific <<http://www.nytimes.com/2011/04/02/world/asia/02afghanistan.html>> [accessed 29 November 2013].
2. Howard Kurtz, 'Newsweek Apologizes', *The Washington Post*, 16 May 2005, section Nation <<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2005/05/15/AR2005051500605.html>> [accessed 29 November 2013].
3. Anthony Burgess, 'The Burning Truth', *The Daily Mail*, 21 January 1989.
4. 'North Dakota Book Burning Nazi Style', *Lodi News-Sentinel*, 20 November 1973, p. 6.
5. 'A Women's Refuge Is to Burn Copies of 50 Shades of Grey ...Sorry, but Have I Woken up in 1930s Germany?', *Mail Online* <<http://www.dailymail.co.uk/debate/article-2193026/A-womens-refuge-burn-copies-50-Shades-Grey--sorry-I-woke-1930s-Germany.html>> [accessed 29 November 2013].
6. Matthew Fishburn, *Burning Books* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), p. 44.
7. Fishburn, *Burning Books*, p. 73.
8. George Orwell, 'Literature and Totalitarianism', p. 505. The original broadcast was made on 21 May 1941 (quoted in Fishburn, *Burning Books*, pp 99–100).
9. Fishburn, *Burning Books*, p. 105.
10. Fishburn, *Burning Books*, p. 115.
11. *The Riverside Milton*, ed. Roy Flannigan (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1998), p. 1005.
12. Quoted in Diane S. Wood, 'Bradbury and Atwood: Exile as Rational Decision', *Fahrenheit 451: New Edition* (New York: Infobase Publishing, 2008), p. 44.
13. Rebecca Knuth, *Libricide: The Regime-Sponsored Destruction of Books and Libraries in the Twentieth Century* (Westport: Praeger, 2003).
14. Rebecca Knuth, *Burning Books and Leveling Libraries: Extremist Violence and Cultural Destruction* (Westport: Praeger, 2006).
15. Knuth, *Libricide*, p. 1. There is a small body of work on book destruction, most of which focuses, understandably, on the theme of irretrievable cultural loss. See, for example, James Raven's collection, *Lost Libraries: The*

- 1 *Destruction of Great Book Collections since Antiquity* (Basingstoke and New
2 York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004). One exception is Fernando Baez and Alfred
3 J. MacAdam, *A Universal History of the Destruction of Books: From Ancient Sumer
4 to Modern Iraq* (New York: Atlas & Co./W. W. Norton, 2008), which provides
5 a wide-ranging historical survey.
- 6 16. Leah Price, *How to Do Things with Books in Victorian Britain* (Princeton:
7 Princeton University Press, 2012).
- 8 17. See, for example, D. F. McKenzie, *Bibliography and the Sociology of Text*
9 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999); D. F. McKenzie, *Making
10 Meaning: 'Printers of the Mind' and Other Essays*, ed. Peter D. McDonald
11 and Michael F. Suarez, S.J. (Cambridge MA: University of Massachusetts
12 Press, 2002); John N. King (ed.), *Tudor Books and the Material Construction of
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- 14 18. William H. Sherman, *Used Books: Marking Readers in Renaissance Books*
15 (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008).
- 16 19. See Deidre Lynch, *The Economy of Character: Novels, Market Culture, and
17 the Business of Inner Meaning* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998);
18 William Warner, *Licensing Entertainment: The Elevation of Novel Reading in
19 Britain, 1684–1750* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998); James
20 Raven, *The Business of Books: Booksellers and the English Book Trade, 1450–
21 1850* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007); Patrick Brantlinger, *The
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23 (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1998).
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30 2011), pp. 99–114.
- 31 21. This approach emerges out of media theory rather than literary studies. See
32 Friedrich A. Kittler, *Discourse Networks, 1800/1900* (Stanford, CA: Stanford
33 University Press, 1992); Bernhard Siegert, *Relays: Literature as an Epoch of
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- 37 22. See Kevin McLaughlin, *Paperwork: Fiction and Mass Mediacy in the Paper Age*
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- 40 23. Roger Chartier, *The Order of Books: Readers, Authors, and Libraries in Europe
41 Between the Fourteenth and Eighteenth Centuries* (Cambridge: Polity Press,
42 1994).

1 **Part I**
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3 **Burning**
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Burning Sex Subjects: Books, Homophobia and the Nazi Destruction of the Institute of Sexual Sciences in Berlin

Heike Bauer

The Nazi book burnings are one of the defining moments both in the modern history of the book and twentieth-century history more broadly. Historians of Nazism have paid considerable attention to their role in the escalation of Nazi terror and its Anglo-American reception.¹ Other critiques of violence and hatred have similarly turned to the events of 1933 to ask what it is, to borrow the words of Rebecca Knuth, ‘about texts and libraries that puts them in the line of fire during social conflict?’² Knuth answers her own question by pointing to the crucial role of books in collective identity formation and its sustenance. ‘As the voice and memory of the targeted group’, she argues, ‘books and libraries are central to culture and identity [and] vital in sustaining a group’s uniqueness’.³ For Knuth and many other critics, books are the material correlative of an established cultural identity, and book burnings constitute the attempt to eradicate it. This line of investigation, which has productively examined the symbolism of burning books – including the fact that it has a limited function as an act of censorship – tends to focus on the losses incurred in the act of destruction. I want to turn attention to the remains: the documents and objects which survived the Nazi attack on books in the raid on Magnus Hirschfeld’s (1868–1935) Institute of Sexual Sciences in Berlin.

The Institute’s library was the first point of attack in the series of events that have become known as the Nazi book burnings. As a centre of medico-scientific sexological research, it contributed to the production of a modern understanding of sexuality, while the Institute’s public activities and political campaigning for the decriminalisation of homosexuality shaped an usually affirmative space for queer culture in Berlin. There is some critical consensus that the Institute’s association, via its founder, with both homosexuality and Jewishness, explains why

1 it was the first place to be raided in the Nazi attack against books.⁴ Yet
2 while historians of sexuality have rightly pointed out that the upsurge
3 of violence against books was propelled by homophobia as well as anti-
4 Semitism,⁵ many broader histories of the book burnings tend to dismiss
5 the importance of homophobia as an analytical category.⁶ By examin-
6 ing the remnants that remained undestroyed in the events of May 1933,
7 this chapter turns fresh attention to the homophobic underpinnings of
8 the Nazi attack against Hirschfeld's Institute and its reception. It shows
9 how the materiality of the books and papers under attack influenced
10 how they were handled, and considers why and how some objects –
11 notably a collection of questionnaires and a bronze statue – survived the
12 events. The chapter argues that while an examination of the symbolism
13 of the book burnings tells us something about the psychic structures
14 that made these hateful acts appear necessary for the Nazi claim on
15 power, the remnants that survived these events reveal how homopho-
16 bia shaped the book burnings and their reception.

18 Books and bodies at the Institute of Sexual Sciences

20 Hirschfeld established the Institute for Sexual Sciences in Berlin in July
21 1919 with the aim of building a space for 'research, teaching, healing,
22 and refuge' that could 'free the individual from physical ailments, psy-
23 chological afflictions, and social deprivation'.⁷ The Institute was housed
24 in the imposing former home of the German ambassador to France,
25 which had been bought by Hirschfeld during the reshuffling of political
26 power and property in the immediate aftermath of the First World War.
27 Around the same time, Hirschfeld also set up the Magnus-Hirschfeld-
28 Foundation, a charitable organisation that would – together with
29 donations from anonymous private supporters and Hirschfeld himself –
30 provide the necessary funding for the Institute's many activities. The
31 Institute became most famous for Hirschfeld's work on homosexual-
32 ity and cross-dressing – he coined the term 'transvestism' in 1910.⁸
33 However, it supported a much wider range of activities including sex
34 and marriage counselling services, the provision of sexual health clinics,
35 advice on contraception and the development of medical, anthropolog-
36 ical and psychological research on all aspects of gender and sexuality.⁹
37 In addition, it provided office space for feminist activists, sex reform
38 journals and organisations such as the influential World League for
39 Sexual Reform, which had been co-founded by Hirschfeld in 1921.¹⁰ Life
40 at the Institute was characterised by the blurring of boundaries between
41 professional and private space as it offered living accommodation for

1 a number of people who worked there. Hirschfeld himself occupied
2 rooms on the second floor with his partner Karl Giese; other rooms
3 were rented out to permanent and temporary staff and visitors, some
4 of whom, most famously perhaps the American writer Christopher
5 Isherwood and the English anthropologist Francis Turville-Petre, lived
6 at the Institute for prolonged periods of time.¹¹

7 The Institute's location in Berlin put it physically and symbolically
8 at the centre of both the German homosexual liberation movement
9 and the efforts to suppress homosexuality in the country. Hirschfeld
10 was one of the leading figures in the campaign for the abolishment
11 of Paragraph 175, the legal statute that criminalised 'indecent acts'
12 between men.¹² It had been introduced throughout Germany less than
13 half a century before the Institute was set up. Following the founding
14 of the German Empire in 1871, the anti-homosexuality legislation of
15 Prussia, the most powerful of the independent German states, was intro-
16 duced throughout the new nation. Hirschfeld's activism against this
17 persecution of homosexuals, and his medical expertise on homosexu-
18 ality, made him a well-known figure in the German and international
19 press. The founding of the Institute further strengthened Hirschfeld's
20 international reputation, even as the Institute's reform-oriented goals
21 and ethnographic research methods cemented Hirschfeld's professional
22 fallout both with avowedly 'apolitical' sexologists such as Albert Moll
23 and Sigmund Freud's growing psychoanalytic movement.¹³

24 Books were central to the Institute's activities. By 1919, Hirschfeld
25 had already published more than two dozen books, pamphlets and
26 articles, which, while ranging from considerations of alcoholism to the
27 psychology of war, mostly focused on aspects of same-sex sexuality.¹⁴
28 In 1914 he published his most comprehensive study, *Die Homosexualität*
29 *des Mannes und des Weibes* [Homosexuality of Man and Woman], a tome
30 of more than a thousand pages. Hirschfeld's model of human sexuality
31 was somatic, that is, he understood both sexual desires and the manifes-
32 tation of gender to be encoded in the body.¹⁵ He coined the concept of
33 'sexuelle Zwischenstufen' – 'sexual intermediaries' – to describe his idea
34 that there exist infinite natural variations in sexual desires and bodies.
35 At the same time, however, he also acknowledged the significance of
36 social context on sexual development, and argued that the existence of
37 different sexual customs around the world is indicative of the 'natural-
38 ness' of variations in sexual behaviour.¹⁶

39 The written word alone did not suffice in Hirschfeld's quest to record
40 as many examples as possible of 'sexual intermediaries'. Next to a large
41 library of published and unpublished works, his collections at the Institute

1 also included objects such as sex toys and, more famously, a large num-
2 ber of photographs. Many of Berlin's cross-dressers and other 'sexual
3 deviants' visited the Institute and had their picture taken there. These
4 portraits were displayed alongside images of the Institute's transgender
5 and intersex patients.¹⁷ Images of same-sex couples who posed together
6 for the camera were displayed alongside staged photographs of cross-
7 dressed women and men and close-ups of naked body parts. Critics
8 have rightly questioned the ethics of turning bodies into objects of
9 scientific study in this way and exposing them to the gaze of expert
10 and lay viewers, a criticism which seems borne out in particular by the
11 Institute's collection of close-ups of the genitals of transgender and
12 intersex bodies.¹⁸ Yet the Institute's photographic collection also testifies
13 to a more affirmative relationship between such 'scientific' photography
14 and Berlin's sexual subcultures. It documents the existence of a rich
15 and thriving queer subculture in and beyond early twentieth-century
16 Berlin, not least enabled by the fact that Hirschfeld himself was a well-
17 known figure in Berlin's homosexual circles, which he frequented with
18 his lover, and where he was also known under his cross-dressed name,
19 'Tante Magnesia'. The Institute's photographs contributed to the self-
20 construction of this queer community even as many of the images
21 clearly made use of a visual medical language that turned women and
22 men into case studies.

23 A further function of the photographs was that they helped to trans-
24 mit long and complex written texts to a wider audience. The images
25 offered a kind of visual shorthand to Hirschfeld's theorisation of 'sexual
26 intermediaries', depicting at a glance phenomena which in their writ-
27 ten exposition covered hundreds of pages of scientific writing. In con-
28 trast to the often forbidding size of his printed books, the photographs
29 offered a more instantaneous access to Hirschfeld's work, revealing the
30 variety of expressions – both clothed and naked – of the human body.
31 This material helped to disseminate Hirschfeld's theories to a wider
32 public. Some of the photographs were reproduced in Hirschfeld's publi-
33 cations such as the popular study of Berlin's sexual subcultures, *Berlins*
34 *Drittes Geschlecht* [Berlin's Third Sex] (1904).¹⁹ Many others were put
35 together on large but portable display panels. Used both as research data
36 and to illustrate Hirschfeld's ideas, these panels with images of 'sexual
37 intermediaries' were put on display at the Institute and also illustrated
38 Hirschfeld's public lectures. The panels mediated encounters between
39 the Institute's queer books and the wider public who were introduced
40 via the photographs to people who were what Hirschfeld called 'anders
41 als die anderen': different from the others.²⁰

Loose paper

Where Hirschfeld tried to capture on print and photographic paper the somatic reality of sexual desire, the materiality of the texts on which these observations were recorded would inadvertently help to determine whether or not they survived the Nazi attack. The Institute was the first target in a series of Nazi offensives that led to the infamous 'book burnings' of 1933. It was raided on Saturday, 6 May 1933, an event that inaugurated a new phase in the ever intensifying Nazi regime of terror. The attack, which followed months of Nazi observation and threats against the Institute, happened in two waves: in the morning, Nazi students entered the Institute and began the process of its physical destruction, followed in the afternoon by members of the SA who conducted a more systematic search and removed large parts of the Institute's library.²¹ The books and 'sexual intermediaries' display panels were loaded onto trucks, ready to be transported to their place of destruction.

On the surface, the attack appears to have been directed against all of the Institute's holdings. The so-called 'black list' of books, which guided the SA, clearly instructed that Magnus Hirschfeld's 'sämmliche Schriften' [complete writings] be destroyed.²² However, eyewitnesses recall that there was a degree of selection in the process, which suggests that the raid was less about the literal erasure of all of the Institute's holdings than it was concerned with the spectacular effects of invading and devastating a place that hitherto offered a safe space for explorations of non-normative sexualities. A contemporary observer, who was present during the raid, describes how after the indiscriminate vandalism of the morning, the SA in the afternoon took 'basket after basket of valuable books and manuscripts' including 'bound volumes of periodicals', 'the material belonging to the *World League for Sexual Reform*' and 'the whole edition of the journal *Sexus*'.²³ The eyewitness then notes that the Nazis also 'wanted to take away several thousand questionnaires ... but desisted when they were assured that these were simply medical histories'.²⁴ This remark points to a curious footnote in the history of the attack on the Institute: that many of its questionnaires would survive the raid despite the fact that they contained information about sexually 'deviant' women and men which overtly undermined the rigid sex/gender binary of the Nazi regime.²⁵

The questionnaires were one of the most famous and controversial aspects of Hirschfeld's work. He first developed what he called the 'Psychobiologischer Fragebogen' [psycho-biological questionnaire] in

1 1900 for use as a diagnostic tool in his clinic.²⁶ Containing a series of
 2 127 or so questions that ranged from enquiries about language devel-
 3 opment in childhood to reflections on sexual preferences in adult-
 4 hood, it was handed out to those of Hirschfeld's patients who directly
 5 or indirectly sought advice on issues relating to their own sexuality.²⁷
 6 Hirschfeld was partly motivated by scientific concerns, aiming to collect
 7 statistical data on homosexual existence and to gain better insight into
 8 the lives of women and men whose desires and bodies exceeded het-
 9 erosexual norms. He noted that many women and men found it nigh
 10 on impossible to discuss their concerns with him fully and openly. By
 11 giving them a printed questionnaire which they could take home and
 12 fill in whenever they were ready to do so, Hirschfeld sought to allevi-
 13 ate the psychic restrictions imposed on the doctor-patient encounter
 14 by the fact that homosexuality was a social taboo. The questionnaire
 15 allowed patients to write down their thoughts in a collected, deliberate
 16 manner, revising them if necessary and, where appropriate, consulting
 17 with their parents or siblings about aspects of the family history or their
 18 own childhood.²⁸ In addition, Hirschfeld sent out the questionnaire
 19 to a number of sample groups – including, for instance, students at a
 20 technical college – in a bid to gather statistical information about the
 21 percentage of homosexual women and men in the population at large.
 22 By the time of the Nazi raid, he had collected more than 10,000 ques-
 23 tionnaires, the longest of which was 360 hand-written pages long and
 24 had taken almost six months to complete.²⁹

25 The survival of much of this material has fuelled persistent and
 26 sometimes pernicious critical debates about the relationship between
 27 Nazism and homosexuality.³⁰ Some critics, including the Hirschfeld
 28 biographer Charlotte Wolff, and Erwin Haeberle, the editor of a new
 29 edition of Hirschfeld's main work, have speculated that the question-
 30 naires and similar 'confessional' materials were deliberately spared in
 31 the raid so that they could be used later by the Gestapo to root out
 32 homosexuals.³¹ Haeberle goes so far as to suggest that what he calls 'the
 33 apparent destruction of the Institute' was in fact 'a cover operation to
 34 retrieve ... incriminating evidence against both prominent Nazi leaders
 35 and their opponents'.³² It is important to resist such neat explanations
 36 about a Nazi conspiracy against the Institute, for they all too easily
 37 lend themselves to being appropriated into incendiary claims about the
 38 alleged homosexual underpinnings of the Nazi regime. The idea that,
 39 as Theodor Adorno put it, 'totalitarianism and homosexuality belong
 40 together'³³ first emerged during the Nazi reign, when opponents polem-
 41 ically attacked the regime by focusing on the homosexuality of SA

1 leader Ernst Röhm, who was executed in the so-called 'purge' of 1934.³⁴
 2 Adorno made his anti-homosexuality remarks in 1951 in observations
 3 on what he thought was the rise of a new kind of violent masculinity
 4 in post-war culture. However, other post-war commentators turned
 5 directly to Hirschfeld's work to insinuate that Nazism had been driven
 6 by the latent and apparent homosexuality of its leaders. The American
 7 lawyer Morris Leopold Ernst, for instance, who had defended James
 8 Joyce's *Ulysses* in the novel's US obscenity trial, co-wrote with journalist
 9 David Loth a response to the publication of the Kinsey reports which
 10 curiously aligned homosexuality with Nazism by evoking Hirschfeld's
 11 questionnaires. Ernst and Loth cite Hirschfeld's findings to argue
 12 that while it is impossible to know 'just how big a proportion of his
 13 [Hirschfeld's] estimated million and half German homosexuals found
 14 their way into Nazi uniform ... a good many of them were attracted by
 15 the Nazi principles'.³⁵ By drawing on Hirschfeld's statistics about homo-
 16 sexuality to ponder what kind of person would be attracted to Nazism,
 17 the US commentators thus employ a discursive sleight of hand that
 18 implicitly links the homosexual sexologist with the Nazi perpetrators
 19 who destroyed his life's work.

20 As the questionnaires established a reputation that would outlive
 21 the death of Hirschfeld's German sexology, it seems unlikely that the
 22 Nazi thugs would have deliberately spared such a contentious body of
 23 texts. According to the eyewitness account, the questionnaires remained
 24 largely unscathed because they were seen to be 'medical histories', that
 25 is, accounts of individual illness. This would suggest that their associa-
 26 tion with medicine protected these texts, and that medicine retained its
 27 authority even amidst the violent excess of the attack on the Institute.
 28 Yet this idea is somewhat undermined by the fact many of the
 29 Institute's other medical texts were destroyed. While it may be impos-
 30 sible to explain fully the element of chance by which the questionnaires
 31 survived the raid, we can nevertheless gain a sense of the practical
 32 circumstance that aided their escape from Nazi destruction. For what
 33 distinguished the questionnaires from other medical books and manu-
 34 scripts was less their content than their physical form: they consisted
 35 of a large volume of loose paper. According to estimates there existed at
 36 least 10,000 completed questionnaires, each of which was made up of
 37 multiple pages. Even if not all of them covered as many as 336 pages of
 38 handwriting, they still formed a formidable collection of paper. While
 39 photographic evidence of the raid and subsequent book burnings shows
 40 that individual sheets of paper were collected and thrown onto the fire,
 41 it seems possible that the practical difficulties involved in removing

the large archive of unbound, handwritten questionnaires aided their serendipitous survival. Material concerns may have spared this intimate archive, then, despite, not because of, the fact that it documented the existence of German women and men whose lives, while embedded into the social fabric of the nation, fundamentally undermined the 'Aryan' ideal.

Handling homosexual texts

If materiality played a role in the selection of texts for destruction, their content influenced the way these materials were handled. By 1933, the Institute had become a flagship organisation for sexology, a field of investigation that was first formed in relation to nineteenth-century medico-forensic research but which soon became highly politicised, supporting homosexual rights activism as well as birth control and other sexual reform initiatives. Ludwig Levy-Lenz, a physician at the Institute who pioneered gender reassignment surgery, has suggested that the findings emerging from sexological research were the sole reason why the Institute was attacked by the Nazis. The 'purely scientific Institute was the first victim which fell to the new regime', he argues, because its members 'knew too much' about the taboo subject of sexuality generally and the sexual behaviours and proclivities of German women and men more specifically.³⁶ Levy-Lenz fails to mention that the Institute's association with sexology was further complicated by the fact that many leading sexologists – Hirschfeld included – were Jews.³⁷ Subsequent analyses of the events have suggested that the reason why Hirschfeld's Institute was, in the words of James Steakley, 'the first target' in the attempt to purge the nation of 'un-German spirit by destroying objectionable books' is precisely because of its association with both Jewishness and homosexuality.³⁸ For if, as Michael H. Kater has argued, 'the alleged bastardization of the "Aryan" race by Jews was [seen to be] a biological-medical problem by virtue of the entry of Jewish semen into the German female organism [and] it was also a moral one because of promiscuity', then the Institute's collection of texts on sexuality – many of them written by Jewish sexologists – exemplified the problem of sexual knowledge and the influence exercised by the 'Jewish' ideas about sexuality.³⁹

It is questionable, however, that the Nazi thugs who attacked the Institute were familiar with the data and detailed arguments about homosexuality, transvestism and other sexual behaviours and identities found in the Institute's collections. Slavoj Žižek, in his analysis of racial

1 violence and the anti-Semitic pogroms has pointed out that such forms
 2 of collective violence are not propelled by 'reality in itself'.⁴⁰ 'What the
 3 perpetrators of the pogroms find intolerable and rage-provoking', he
 4 writes, 'is not the immediate reality of Jews, but ... the image/figure of
 5 the "Jew" which circulates and has been constructed in their tradition.
 6 The catch', he continues, 'is that one single individual cannot distin-
 7 guish in any simple way between real Jews and their anti-Semitic image.
 8 ... What the anti-Semite tries to destroy when he attacks the Jew ... is
 9 this fantasmatic dimension.'⁴¹ Matters are complicated in the raid on
 10 the Institute where the image/target is a 'deviant' blend of Jewishness
 11 and homosexuality. Next to the directive to destroy the 'Jewish ideas',
 12 the knowledge that the books and papers earmarked for destruction
 13 contained writing on homosexuality posed a particular problem for the
 14 management of the destruction of this material: how to handle it with-
 15 out being 'tainted' by homosexuality?

16 Photographs taken during the raid suggest that this question shaped
 17 how the attack was conducted and documented. One of the photo-
 18 graphs indicates that the dissociation of Nazi men from books with
 19 homosexual content was taken seriously. The photograph shows a
 20 student and an SA man standing on top of a mountain of books. The
 21 picture is well lit and its symmetry suggests that it was carefully com-
 22 posed. Both men appear to be intently focused on the materials in front
 23 of them. The student is looking at a couple of pictures while the soldier
 24 is reading a book. Closer inspection of the content makes clear that the
 25 photograph was staged in a way that sought to dissociate the Nazi men
 26 from the content of the materials in which they are so immersed. For
 27 the most prominent feature amidst the large quantity of hardbound
 28 books, cardboard folders and paperbacks is a number of photographs
 29 of topless women. These images, which are strategically based at the
 30 front of the book mountain and in the hands of the student, are highly
 31 untypical of the Institute's holdings, which focused much more sig-
 32 nificantly on depicting 'sexual intermediaries'. By making pornographic
 33 images of women its most prominent feature, this photograph of the
 34 raid heterosexualises the materials which are handled by the Nazi men.
 35 If the picture is unusual in that Nazi propaganda and policy tended to
 36 decry and persecute both pornography and homosexuality, it neverthe-
 37 less points towards the existence of homophobic anxieties that shaped
 38 the raid on Hirschfeld's Institute.⁴² While other photographs of the
 39 attack depict the raiders in the kind of collective state of euphoria that
 40 is often associated with group violence, here the depiction of topless
 41 women in Nazi hands creates a more restrained effect. It maintains the

Institute's association with sexual immorality even as these images also ensure that the Nazi men who 'cleanse' the Institute of its holdings are dissociated from homosexuality.

Hirschfeld's head

Hirschfeld witnessed the attacks of May 1933 from a distance, in the precarious safety of his French exile where he saw in a Paris cinema a newsreel of the raid and subsequent book burnings. Historical images of the Nazi book burnings have gained a degree of iconic status in twentieth-century historiography where they have become synonymous with the Nazi attack on 'culture'. In Anglo-American popular discourse, the book burnings are seen as the moment when Nazi 'barbarism' revealed itself, inaugurating the escalation of the regime's reign of terror and anticipating the mass killings of the camps. However, in a recent reassessment of the contemporary reactions to the book burnings, historian Matthew Fishburn has shown that their impact on debates in the US and UK was not immediate. He points out that famous responses such as the letter of then US President Theodore Roosevelt to the American Bookseller's Association meeting in 1942, which includes the much-quoted line that 'People die, but books never die', were only gradually assembled into the neat narrative of condemnation that accompanies the images by which the book burnings are memorialised in Anglo-American culture today.⁴³ According to Fishburn, it was an article in *Life* magazine published in 1940 which brought together many of the words and images of disapproval that are today associated with Anglo-American responses to these event including the focus on the destruction of 'literature'.⁴⁴ While Fishburn rightly points out that a significant amount of the texts destroyed were non-literary, it is noteworthy that he does not mention that the first book burning was largely fuelled by materials removed from Hirschfeld's Institute. Yet few contemporary observers in 1933 would have failed to notice the key role played by Hirschfeld and the Institute – not least because during these events the physically absent Hirschfeld would be symbolically burnt at the stake.

Similar to the way the Institute was targeted because of its role as a repository of 'Jewish' sexual knowledge and related political ambitions for homosexual rights, Hirschfeld himself was subjected to a double bind of Nazi hate-mongering and violence. Historian Dagmar Herzog, who has undertaken a detailed examination of how 'Nazis eager to advance a sexually conservative agenda drew on the ambivalent association of Jews with both sexual evil and sexual rights', has made a

persuasive case for why Hirschfeld was a particular target.⁴⁵ 'Hirschfeld's contention that sexual orientation was biologically determined', she argues, 'and his widely reported success in organizing Germans in favour of the abolition of paragraph 175 were both labelled appalling [and] Hirschfeld distressed conservatives also because he promoted an ethics of consent'.⁴⁶ By the time the Nazis came to power in 1933, Hirschfeld had long become a figure of attack in right-wing discourses against both Jews and homosexuals. While most of the violence directed against him was verbal, he also suffered physical attacks, most famously surviving in 1920 a beating by right-wing thugs that had left him so severely injured that he was mistakenly declared dead.⁴⁷ Just over a decade later, in 1932, a portrait of Hirschfeld featured in a Nazi election poster as an example of Jewish and homosexual 'un-Germanness'. The poster, which was directed against Hitler's opponent Paul von Hindenburg, describes Hirschfeld as a 'famous expert witness in the courtroom and fighter against Paragraph 175', a statement which indicates that homosexuality itself retained a degree of unspeakability in Nazi propaganda even as it was acknowledged as a political concern. Hirschfeld is depicted alongside portraits of nine other Hitler opponents, ranging from members of the Social Democrats to MPs from the staunchly conservative Centre Party. They are brought together under the heading 'We vote for Hindenburg!', which is rendered in pseudo-Hebraicised font.⁴⁸ The images of these ten men are contrasted in the lower half of the poster with portraits of leading Nazis including Hermann Göring, 'Hauptmann Röhm' and 'Dr Goebbels', whose allegiance is pronounced in bold neo-Gothic lettering, which declares: 'We vote for Hitler!' At the bottom of the poster, even larger neo-Gothic writing exclaims: 'If you look at these heads, you will know where you belong!' The poster's divisive visual language insists on a distinction between 'Aryan' and 'non-Aryan' physiognomies, a distinction typical of Nazi polemic against Jews. Yet it is noteworthy that many of the Nazi opponents included here were, in fact, not Jewish. However, by likening them to the well-known Jews Magnus Hirschfeld and Bernhard Weiss – the vice president of Berlin's police force – the poster makes a claim for the visibly 'un-German' facial features of these men.

A few months after the poster's circulation, Hirschfeld's head would again play a key role in the violent symbolism of the Nazi book burnings. A single, blurry photograph survives that shows a bronze sculpture of Hirschfeld's head being paraded through the streets of Berlin on 10 May 1933. The bust, made by the Jewish sculptor Kurt Harald Isenstein (1898–1980) and presented to Hirschfeld on his sixtieth birthday in

1 1928, had been removed during the raid on the Institute on 6 May.⁴⁹
 2 Four days later it was carried through Berlin to be thrown onto the bon-
 3 fire on Berlin Opernplatz. The famous left-wing author Erich Kästner,
 4 who witnessed these events and the burning of his own work that
 5 night, later described the sense of disturbance he felt at seeing how 'the
 6 head of a smashed up bust of Magnus Hirschfeld, staked high above
 7 the crowd, swayed to and fro' amidst the crowd that had congregated
 8 to watch the events.⁵⁰ The display of Hirschfeld's head in this way
 9 clearly heightens the threatening symbolism of the book burnings by
 10 reminding the audience of the link between the human body and the
 11 textual corpus committed to the flames. But the carrying of the bust on
 12 a stake also tells us something about the psychic structures of hate and
 13 anti-homosexuality that underpinned these attacks. For while the stake
 14 partly serves as a means of display, ensuring that the Hirschfeld bust
 15 can be seen by as many spectators as possible, it also creates a distance
 16 between the bust and its bearers, avoiding direct touch to safeguard the
 17 Nazi men from homosexuality.

18 According to historians George Mosse and James Jones, 'the tossing
 19 of the bust of Hirschfeld into the flames is the sole instance where an
 20 image was burnt with the books'.⁵¹ What makes its role in these events
 21 even more extraordinary is the fact that it resisted destruction. Nazi
 22 film footage of the events on 10 May makes clear that some planning
 23 had gone into constructing the bonfire. It shows that in order to enable
 24 the burning of more than 10,000 books and other materials, the Nazis
 25 had stacked up numerous wooden pallets and filled them partly with
 26 books, constructing a solid framework for a bonfire that would need to
 27 be slow-burning yet well-ventilated.⁵² The footage also shows men and
 28 women, some in Nazi uniform, others in civilian clothes, move around
 29 the lit fire, throwing whole books at it as well as what look like the
 30 occasional individual sheet of paper or piece of cardboard, items that
 31 appear only just heavy enough to make the short flight towards the
 32 flames. The labour involved in this task creates visceral links amongst
 33 the perpetrators, and between them and the objects they destroy. In one
 34 scene, 28 seconds into the footage, we see a human chain passing books
 35 from an unseen place somewhere in the dark distance towards the fire,
 36 while in another scene we see a civilian in a shirt and tie gathering piles
 37 of books from the ground and hurling them towards the flames. The
 38 voiceover explains that German students had 'collected' (eingesammelt)
 39 the books for burning. The camera then moves to Hitler's propaganda
 40 minister, Joseph Goebbels, who addresses the masses, trying to impress
 41 on them what he calls the 'strong, great and symbolic undertaking [of]

enthrust[ing] to the flames the intellectual garbage of the past'.⁵³ In an ironic twist of fate, this symbolic undertaking failed practically when it came to burning Hirschfeld.⁵⁴ For the bust of his head withstood the flames. It was found the day after the bonfire by a street cleaner who took it home and kept it safe until after the end of the Second World War, when he donated it to the Berlin Academy of Arts where it is on display today. Material circumstance aided this serendipitous survival as much as the street cleaner's initiative. For the sculpture of Hirschfeld's head was made from bronze, an alloy containing copper and tin. The melting point of bronze, which varies according to the ratio of its constituents, tends to be significantly higher – between 1,900 and 2,100 Fahrenheit – than the temperature reached by burning paper, which goes up to around 1,500 Fahrenheit. Wood also burns around the 1,100–1,500 Fahrenheit mark, so the book bonfire simply did not get hot enough to melt the bust. The Hirschfeld bronze thus proved to be as impossible to destroy as the legacy of his ideas, which also survived the events of 1933.

Burn marks

By attacking books the Nazi regime acknowledged the power of these small and apparently harmless objects. While books are rightly associated with the cultural life of a nation, the remnants that survived the attack on the library of Hirschfeld's Institute also serve as potent reminders that 'culture' has vicissitudes that reach beyond the realms of art, literature and music. For a regime which sought to articulate itself in relation to an 'Aryan' identity, the Institute's collection of texts that testify to the existence of multiple identities and shifting identifications constituted a dangerous threat to the desired 'Aryan' norm. If, as Judith Butler has argued, subjectivity is defined by the fact that the process of identification is never complete, or, as she puts it, that identification 'can never be said to have taken place; identification does not belong to the world of events', then the sexological and related works are material reminders of the fact that the process of normative assertion is fraught.⁵⁵ The targeting and handling of the sexological texts at the Institute of Sexual Sciences reveal deeply entrenched cultural fantasies about homosexuality and a 'tradition of homophobia' that would retain currency far beyond the Nazi regime.⁵⁶ While it can be difficult to disentangle the history of homophobia from other forms of hatred, a consideration of the materials which survived the attack on Hirschfeld's Institute nevertheless offers glimpses of the homophobic imprints of the Nazi assault on books.

Notes

1. Influential studies in English of the book burnings include Leonidas E. Hill, 'The Nazi Attack on "Un-German" Literature, 1933–1945, in Jonathan Rose (ed.), *The Holocaust and the Book* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2001), pp. 9–46; J. M. Ritchie, 'The Nazi Book-Burning', *The Modern Language Review* 83(3) (1988): 627–43; George Mosse and James Jones, 'Bookburning and the Betrayal of German Intellectuals', *New German Critique* 31 (1984): 143–55. For accounts of the contemporary UK and US reception of the book burnings see Matthew Fishburn, 'Books are Weapons: Wartime Responses to the Nazi Bookfires of 1933', *Book History* 10 (2007): 223–51; and Guy Stern, 'The Burning of the Books in Nazi Germany, 1933: The American Response', *Simon Wiesenthal Annual* 2, chapter 5. Available online: <<http://motlc.wiesenthal.com/site/pp.asp?c=gvKVLcMVLuG&b=395007>> [accessed 1 May 2013].
2. Rebecca Knuth, *Burning Books and Leveling Libraries: Extremist Violence and Cultural Destruction* (Westport: Praeger, 2006), p. 2.
3. Rebecca Knuth, *Libricide: The Regime-Sponsored Destruction of Books and Libraries in the Twentieth Century* (Westport: Praeger, 2003), p. 9.
4. See, for example, Matthew Fishburn, *Burning Books* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), pp. 41–3. For a recent consideration of the memorialisation of Nazi victims with complex identities such as Hirschfeld see Christiane Wilke, 'Remembering Complexity? Memorials for Nazi Victims in Berlin', *International Journal of Transitional Justice* 7(1) (2013): 136–56.
5. Erwin J. Haeberle, 'Swastika, Pink Triangle and Yellow Star: The Destruction of Sexology and the Persecution of Homosexuals in Nazi Germany', *The Journal of Sex Research* 17(3) (1981): 270–87; James D. Steakley, *The Homosexual Emancipation Movement in Germany* (Salem, NH: Ayer, 1975); Stefan Micheler, trans. Patricia Szorbar, 'Homophobia, Propaganda and the Denunciation of Same-Sex Desiring Men under National Socialism', in Dagmar Herzog (ed.), *Sexuality and German Fascism* (London: Berghahn, 2005), pp. 95–130.
6. Richard J. Evans, for example, who in his influential *The Coming of the Third Reich* gives quite a full account of the raid on Hirschfeld's Institute, dismisses its significance when he claims that it 'was only one part, if the most spectacular, of a far more wide-ranging assault on what the Nazis portrayed as the Jewish movement to subvert the German family'. Richard J. Evans, *The Coming of the Third Reich: How the Nazis Destroyed Democracy and Seized Power in Germany* (London: Penguin, 2004), p. 376.
7. The online exhibition of the Magnus Hirschfeld Society provides an excellent overview of the Institute's history: <<http://www.hirschfeld.in-berlin.de/institut/en/iframe.html>>.
8. Magnus Hirschfeld, *Die Transvestiten: Eine Untersuchung über den erotischen Verkleidungstrieb* (Berlin: A. Pulvermacher, 1910).
9. The tensions at the Institute between homosexual reformers and the feminist movement are addressed by Atina Grossmann, 'Magnus Hirschfeld, Sexualreform und die Neue Frau: Das Institut für Sexualwissenschaften und das Weimarer Berlin', in Elke-Vera Kotowski and Julius Schoeps (eds), *Magnus Hirschfeld: Ein Leben im Spannungsfeld von Wissenschaft, Politik und Gesellschaft* (Berlin: be.bra, 2004), pp. 201–6.

- 1 10. See Reiner Herrn, 'Vom Traum zum Trauma: Das Institut für
2 Sexualwissenschaft', in Kotowski and Schoeps (eds), *Magnus Hirschfeld*,
3 pp. 173–99.
- 4 11. Christopher Isherwood provides an account his life at the Institute in
5 *Christopher and his Kind* ([1976] London: Vintage, 2012), pp. 15–19.
- 6 12. John Fout, 'Sexual Politics in Wilhelmine Germany: The Male Gender Crisis,
7 Moral Purity, and Homophobia', *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 2(3) (1992):
8 388–421.
- 9 13. See Volkmar Sigusch, 'The Sexologist Albert Moll: Between Sigmund Freud
10 and Magnus Hirschfeld', *Medical History* 56(2) (2012): 184–200.
- 11 14. They include a number of Hirschfeld's main studies of female and male
12 same-sex sexuality including *Sappho und Sokrates* (Leipzig: Max Spohr, 1896);
13 *Der Urnische Mensch* (Leipzig: Max Spohr, 1903); and *Berlins Drittes Geschlecht*
14 (1904).
- 15 15. Magnus Hirschfeld, *Die Homosexualität des Mannes und des Weibes*, Nachdruck
16 der Erstauflage von 1914 mit einer kommentierten Einleitung von E. J.
17 Haeberle (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1984).
- 18 16. Hirschfeld's longest and today best-known travelogue is his account of a two-
19 year journey that took in the United States, Asia and the Middle East which
20 was written in German but more widely circulated in English translation
21 due to the Nazi regulation of the German publishing industry. The British
22 version of the book is Magnus Hirschfeld, *Women East and West: Impressions*
23 *of a Sex Expert*, trans. Olive Green (London: W. Heinemann, 1935); the title
24 of the US version is Magnus Hirschfeld, *Men and Women: The World Journey*
25 *of a Sexologist*, trans. O. P. Green (New York: G. P. Putnam's, 1935).
- 26 17. Susan Stryker discusses Hirschfeld's role in *Transgender History* (Berkeley, CA:
27 Seal Press, 2008), pp. 38–41.
- 28 18. For a recent discussion of medical practice see S. Creighton, J. Alderson,
29 S. Brown and C. L. Minto, 'Medical Photography: Ethics, Consent, and the
30 Intersex Patient', *BJU International* 89(1) (2002): 67–71.
- 31 19. The 9th edition of the work was reissued in the 1990s as Magnus Hirschfeld,
32 *Berlins Drittes Geschlecht*, ed. Manfred Herzer (Berlin: Rosa Winkel, 1991).
- 33 20. *Anders als die Anderen* (dir. Richard Oswald) is the title of a film about homo-
34 sexual blackmail released in German cinemas in 1919, in which Hirschfeld
35 makes a guest appearance.
- 36 21. Good accounts of the destruction of the Institute include Knuth, *Burning Books*
37 *and Leveling Libraries*, pp. 101–20; Steakley, *The Homosexual Emancipation*
38 *Movement*, pp. 103–5. See also Charlotte Wolff, *Magnus Hirschfeld: Portrait of*
39 *a Pioneer in Sexology* (London: Quartet, 1986), pp. 376–9.
- 40 22. *Liste des schädlichen und unerwünschten Schrifttums*, Stand vom 31. Dezember
41 1938 (Leipzig, 1938). Published online: <http://www.berlin.de/rubrik/hauptstadt/verbannte_buecher/index.php>.
23. World Committee for the Victims of Fascism, *The Brown Book of the Hitler Terror* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1938), pp. 158–61.
24. World Committee for the Victims of Fascism, *The Brown Book of the Hitler Terror*, pp. 158–61. See also Steakley, *The Homosexual Emancipation Movement*, pp. 103–5.
25. For a good overview of the issues at stake see Herzog (ed.), *Sexuality and German Fascism* (London: Berghahn, 2005).

32 Heike Bauer

- 1 26. The date is derived from Hirschfeld's own account in *Die Homosexualität*
2 *des Mannes und des Weibes*, published in 1914, in which he claims to have
3 first drafted the questionnaire 'vor 14 Jahren': 14 years ago. Hirschfeld, *Die*
4 *Homosexualität des Mannes und des Weibes*, p. 2140. Elena Mancini in contrast
5 claims that Hirschfeld developed the questionnaire in 1902 with his friend
6 Hermann von Teschenberg. See her *Magnus Hirschfeld and the Quest for Sexual*
7 *Freedom* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), p. 174 n. 109.
- 8 27. A sample questionnaire is included in Hirschfeld, *Die Homosexualität des*
9 *Mannes und des Weibes*, pp. 240–63.
- 10 28. Hirschfeld, *Die Homosexualität des Mannes und des Weibes*, p. 239.
- 11 29. Hirschfeld, *Die Homosexualität des Mannes und des Weibes*, p. 262.
- 12 30. Andrew Hewitt has traced the complex ways in which homosexuality
13 and fascism are bound via homophobia in his book *Political Inversions:*
14 *Homosexuality, Fascism and the Modernist Imaginary* (Stanford: Stanford
15 University Press, 1996). See also Elizabeth D. Heineman, 'Sexuality and
16 Nazism: The Doubly Unspeakable?', in Herzog, *Sexuality and German Fascism*,
17 pp. 22–66.
- 18 31. Wolff, *Magnus Hirschfeld*, p. 376; Haeberle, 'Swastika, Pink Triangle and
19 Yellow Star'. Haeberle re-published *Die Homosexualität des Mannes und des*
20 *Weibes* in 1984 including a substantial new introduction which helped
21 to make Hirschfeld's contribution better known amongst historians of
22 sexuality.
- 23 32. Haeberle, 'Swastika, Pink Triangle and Yellow Star', p. 274.
- 24 33. Theodor Adorno, *Minima Moralia: Reflections on a Damaged Life*, trans. E. F.
25 N. Jephcott (London: Verso, 2005), p. 46. Adorno made these remarks in his
26 observation on the increased and idealised representation of virile, strong
27 'he-men'. He argues that the 'pleasures of such men ... all have about them
28 a latent violence'. But, he continues, their 'sadism is a lie ... nothing other
29 than repressed homosexuality presenting itself as the only approved form of
30 heterosexuality' (pp. 46–7).
- 31 34. Elena Mancini provides an account of the Röhm affair in her *Magnus*
32 *Hirschfeld*, pp. 127–32. See also Harry Oosterhuis's analysis of Nazi anxi-
33 eties about intense homosociality, 'Male Bonding and Homosexuality in
34 Nazi Germany', *Journal of Contemporary History* 32(2) (1997): 187–205; and
35 his "'Jews" of the Antifascist Left: Homosexuality and Social Resistance to
36 Nazism', in Gert Hekma, Harry Oosterhuis and James Steakley (eds), *Gay Men*
37 *and the Sexual History of the Political Left* (Binghamton, NY: Harrington Press,
38 1995), pp. 227–58.
- 39 35. Morris Leopold Ernst and David Loth, *Sexual Behaviour and the Kinsey*
40 *Report* (London: Falcon Press, 1949), p. 170. For more on the links between
41 Nazism and homosexuality in post-war culture see Dorthe Seifert, 'Silence
and License: The Representations of the National Socialist Persecution of
Homosexuality in Anglo-American Fiction and Film', *History and Memory*
15(2) (2003): 94–129.
- 36 Cited in Haeberle, 'Swastika, Pink Triangle and Yellow Star', pp. 273–4.
- 37 Jewishness and sexology have been analysed by David Baile, 'The Discipline
of *Sexualwissenschaft* Emerges in Germany, Creating Divergent Notions of
European Jewry', in Sander L. Gilman and Jack Zipes (eds), *Yale Companion*
to *Jewish Writing and Thought in German Culture 1096–1996* (New Haven:

- Yale University Press, 1997), pp. 273–9; and Christina von Braun, ‘Ist die Sexualwissenschaft eine “jüdische” Wissenschaft?’ in Kotowski and Schoeps (eds), *Magnus Hirschfeld*, pp. 255–69. See also Stephen Frosh’s study *Hate and the Jewish Science: Anti-Semitism, Nazism and Psychoanalysis* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009).
38. Steakley, *The Homosexual Emancipation Movement*, p. 103.
39. Michael H. Kater, *Doctors Under Hitler* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1989), p. 179.
40. Slavoj Žižek, *Violence* (London: Profile Books, 2009), p. 57.
41. Žižek, *Violence*, p. 57.
42. See for instance Robert Gellately, *Backing Hitler: Consent and Coercion in Nazi Germany* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), pp. 60–3.
43. Fishburn, ‘Books are Weapons’, p. 236.
44. Fishburn, ‘Books are Weapons’, p. 227.
45. Dagmar Herzog, *Sex After Fascism: Memory and Mortality in Twentieth-Century Germany* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005), p. 23.
46. Herzog, *Sex After Fascism*, p. 23.
47. Magnus Hirschfeld, ‘Autobiographical Sketch’, in Victor Robinson (ed.), *Encyclopedia Sexualis: A Comprehensive Encyclopedia-Dictionary of Sexual Sciences* (New York: Dingwall-Rock, 1936), pp. 317–21.
48. ‘Wir wählen Hindenburg – Wir wählen Hitler’ poster (1932). Museum of Jewish Heritage, New York, ID no.: 2005.A40. <http://collection.mjhnyc.org/index.php?g=detail&action=search&object_id=6168> [accessed 10 May 2013].
49. See Hirschfeld’s own account of events in Wolff, *Magnus Hirschfeld*, p. 379.
50. Reprinted in Ritchie, ‘The Nazi Book Burnings’, p. 630.
51. Mosse and Jones, ‘Bookburning and the Betrayal of German Intellectuals’, p. 144.
52. The historical film footage can be accessed as *Books Burn As Goebbels Speaks*, Germany May 10, 1933 [German, 2:55] on the website of The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum (USHMM): <http://www.ushmm.org/wlc/en/media_fi.php?ModuleId=10005852&MediaId=158> [accessed 10 May 2013]. The Museum contrasts this film with footage of an *Anti-Nazi Protest* through lower Manhattan, which was organised by the American Jewish Congress on 10 March 1933 to coincide with the book burning in Berlin.
53. The translation is the English transcript provided by the USHMM: <http://www.ushmm.org/wlc/en/media_fi.php?ModuleId=10005852&MediaId=158> [accessed 10 May 2013].
54. *Archive of Sexology*: <<http://www2.hu-berlin.de/sexology/GESUND/ARCHIV/COLLMHB.HTM>>. See also the archive of the Akademie der Künste: <http://www.adk.de/de/archiv/archivbestand/kunstsammlung/index.htm?hg=sammlung&we_objectID=1914> [accessed 10 May 2013].
55. Judith Butler, *Bodies that Matter: On the Discursive Limits of Sex* (New York: Routledge, 1993), p. 68.
56. The phrase ‘tradition of homophobia’ comes from Micheler, ‘Homophobia, Propaganda and the Denunciation of Same-Sex Desiring Men under National Socialism’, p. 98.

2

Burning to Read: Ben Jonson's Library Fire of 1623

Adam Smyth

'publish it not, but yet burn it not; and between those,
do what you will with it.'¹

'What is the material history of books with names but
no bodies?''²

Dying books

'This Booke,' wrote Leonard Digges in a preface to Shakespeare's First Folio, 'When Brasse and Marble fade, shall make thee looke / Fresh to all Ages.'³ If we choose the folio *Workes* of Shakespeare (1623) and Ben Jonson (1616) as our bibliographical landmarks, then the history of early modern print is likely to look like a journey towards material permanence: towards the production of books and therefore authors that had the power to endure through time. 'Thou ... art alive still,' wrote Jonson to the dead Shakespeare in a characteristically conditional statement of praise, 'while thy Booke doth live'.⁴

But this is only part of the story. The history of the early modern book is also a history of loss and destruction: of print as impermanent; of literature as something that needs to be forgotten; of books that burn; of reading as an act of throwing away. Most printed texts lived very briefly, and then were gone, forever. About 1 in 10,000 sixteenth-century broadside ballads survives today.⁵ Where did printed pages go to die? Some were used for lining pie dishes; for lighting tobacco; for wrapping vegetables at Bucklesbury Market. 'Great *Iulius* Commentaries lies and rots,' rhymed poet and waterman John Taylor, 'As good for nothing but stoppe mustard pots.'⁶ Sir William Cornwallis kept what he called 'pamphlets and lying-stories and two-penny poets' in his privy, and many texts were 'pressed into general service', as Margaret Spufford

1 put it, as toilet paper.⁷ Books were pulled apart to serve in the binding
2 and end-papers of later books: the pages of an unwanted bible perhaps
3 padding the spine of an unholy prose romance. A *Booke of Common*
4 *Prayer* (1549) in Lambeth Palace Library has end-papers made from a
5 broadside almanac from 1548;⁸ the Folger Shakespeare Library copy of
6 *The Tunnyng of Elynour Rummyng* (1521) – John Skelton's great poem
7 of drunkenness – only survives because it was used as waste paper for
8 the binding of another book.⁹ New books were often pulled apart and
9 reconstituted old books, and while literary criticism has imagined crea-
10 tivity as a process of patching together existing forms, this happened
11 on a material level, too. In such instances, to read an early modern
12 book meant confronting the broken, recycled material remains of for-
13 mer texts, and the effect is of a kind of memory or haunting: of a book
14 remembering its origins. Thomas Nashe imagined his printed pages
15 being used to wrap expensive slippers ('velvet pantofles'), 'so they be
16 not ... mangy at the toes, like an ape about the mouth'.¹⁰ As Leah Price
17 has recently described, we can do many things to books apart from
18 read them.¹¹ Books were often simply read to pieces: the more popular
19 the text (almanacs, ballads), the greater the chance of destruction, with
20 the paradoxical consequence that archival absence in the twenty-first
21 century might be a marker of extensive early modern presence. (This
22 can lead to certain logical oddities: if numerous extant copies indicate
23 popularity, while no extant copies also indicates popularity, how is a
24 lack of popularity conveyed?) As one book historian mournfully notes,
25 'the entire productions of many of the [almanac] authors of this period
26 have disappeared...we know of such authors as George Williams ...
27 Barnabe Gaynsforth ... [and] Thomas Stephens, Gent, ... [only] by their
28 names appearing among the licenses.'¹²

29 Such a culture upsets any direct coupling of print with textual per-
30 manence. Famous literary celebrations of the capacity of writing to
31 endure – like Shakespeare's 'Yet, do thy worst, old Time: despite thy
32 wrong, / My love shall in my verse ever live young'¹³ – might thus
33 be read not as descriptions of bibliographical norms, but rather as
34 counter-voices whose wit and urgency derived from their inversion of
35 a prevailing culture of textual transience. Such a culture might be one
36 surprising point of contact or empathy between twenty-first-century
37 scholars, and the early modern period which they study. If the con-
38 stant doubting hum that accompanies scholarly writing is that sense
39 of how much from the past has been lost, then early modern writers
40 wrote, and early modern readers read, with a comparable expectation
41 of quotidian loss.¹⁴

1 Alongside everyday transience, there was also destruction of a more
 2 spectacular kind. The link between early modern book destruction,
 3 and in particular burning, and censorship or punishment, has been
 4 described.¹⁵ Religious discord in the form of the Reformation catalysed
 5 an emerging English tradition of burning prohibited books: while in
 6 China, a lengthy tradition of book burning extended back to the third
 7 century BCE, it was only in the 1520s that (in Brian Cummings's words)
 8 book burning became 'a major European sport'.¹⁶ Martin Luther's books
 9 were burnt in May 1521 in the churchyard of St Paul's Cathedral, as
 10 Cardinal Wolsey and the papal ambassadors watched on: the books,
 11 here, a surrogate for their author. William Tyndale's English translation
 12 of the New Testament was burned at Cheapside Cross on 19 November
 13 1530. In February 1557, and with, to modern eyes, a slippage between
 14 corpus as body (the early modern sense) and corpus as a collection of
 15 writing (an eighteenth-century connotation), the remains of the buried
 16 Martin Bucer and Paul Fagius were dug up and burnt at Cambridge
 17 along with their books: an event remembered and illustrated in John
 18 Foxe's *Actes and Monuments*.¹⁷ Religious discord might also catalyse
 19 provincial, ad hominem instances of book destruction. Quarter ses-
 20 sion records record that in September 1641, a weaver of Earls Colne,
 21 Essex, named Thomas Harvy, was so angered by the preaching of
 22 Ralph Josselin – known to us now, but not then, as the diarist – that he
 23 returned to the church later in the day and 'tooke the Common prayer
 24 brooke and threw it into a pond thereby, & the next day in the morning
 25 he went to the pond & tooke out the sayd booke [and] Cutt it in pieces:
 26 p[ar]te thereof he did burne, some he threw away & some he kept in
 27 his pocket'.¹⁸ This remarkable instance of book destruction across three
 28 forms (cutting, burning, drowning), suggests that different modes of
 29 destruction carried different connotations. How was burning a book
 30 different from drowning or 'Cutt[ing] it in pieces'?

31 Other burnings were not explicitly religious in motivation, but rather
 32 expressed a jumpy royal authority. The so-called 'Bishops Ban' of 1599
 33 ordered nine books of epigrams and satires to burn outside Stationer's
 34 Hall: the texts seen as politically subversive by a teetering and paranoid
 35 Elizabethan regime. At the same time, some 1,500 copies of the second
 36 edition of John Hayward's *The First Part of the Life and Raigne of King*
 37 *Henrie III* (1599) – a text understood by Queen Elizabeth as a catalyst for
 38 the Earl of Essex's ambitions – were burned at the Bishop of London's
 39 residence at Fulham Palace. James I ordered books to be burnt at
 40 Paul's Cross, including, in February 1625, 800 copies of Edward Elton's
 41 *God's Holy Mind*; and in 1634, William Prynne's anti-theatrical tirade,

Histro-Mastix (1634), which seemed to criticise Queen Henrietta Maria, was condemned to a kind of over-determined destruction: burnt by the hangman in, ironically, as theatrical a manner as possible. Eyewitness reports described the watching Prynne choking from the smoke. Such performances of judicial coercion were one very public way in which books were destroyed. Powerful as a symbol, or as a moment of theatre, such burnings were inefficient as mechanisms of censorship since the flames could never consume all copies: 'at least one example survives of every book, pamphlet, broadsheet and newsbook ordered to be burned in England between 1640 and 1660'.¹⁹ In Jonson's *Sejanus His Fall* (1603), the historian Cordus's writing seems – like John Hayward's *Life and Raigne of King Henrie VIII* – to draw parallels, and find an application, between history, in the form of Julius Caesar's assassination, and the contemporary ruler, Tiberius. As a result, the writings are condemned to 'be burnt. / All sought, and burnt, today'. But this tool of punishment appears inept and absurd, at least to Arruntius:

Let 'em be burnt! Oh, how ridiculous
Appears the Senate's brainless diligence,
Who think they can, with present power, extinguish
The memory of all succeeding times!

What Sabinus calls 'this rage of burning' lends 'to the writers an eternal name'.²⁰ And if the material inefficacy of burning was apparent – destruction defeated, according to Arruntius, by the immateriality of memory – then the theatre of such punishments might also be subverted, or parodied, as David Cressy has argued. London merchant Thomas Sommers, guilty of possessing the Gospels in English, was forced to 'ryde from the Tower into Cheapeside ... behanged with bookes rounde about him'. But Sommers adopted the costume with exaggerated, parodic exuberance: 'I haue alwayes loued to goe hansomly in my apparell,' he declared, '& takyng the bookes and openyng them, he bound them together by the stringes and cast them about his necke (the leaues beyng all open) like a collar, & beyng on horse backe, rode foremost thorow the streetes'.²¹ (The resistance was temporary: Sommers died in the Tower in 1541.)

Jonson's fire

If book destruction as censorship and punishment is one noisy tradition, then accidental book loss was another refrain throughout the early modern period. 1623 saw the publication of Shakespeare's First Folio – a

1 crucial moment in the history of the book, and in the establishment
2 of categories like 'authorship', 'print', and 'literature'; but it was also
3 the year in which a fire destroyed some – or much – or all – (we don't
4 exactly know) – of Ben Jonson's library. What happens to an author's
5 writings when his library goes up in smoke? What kind of transforma-
6 tion occurs when the books he's bought and borrowed, and his own
7 creative work, unpublished, mid-composition, are devoured by flames?
8 Is a library fire a story of loss, or is it something else, too?²²

9 John Aubrey gives a vignette of Jonson's disciplined but reckless
10 working habits: 'He would many times exceed in drinke,' Aubrey
11 writes, 'would tumble home to bed; and when he had thoroughly
12 perspired[,] then to studie. I have seen his studyeing chaire, which was
13 of strawe.'²³ References to Jonson's fondness for alcohol are frequent:
14 William Drummond described drink as 'one of the elements in which
15 ... [Jonson] liveth', and a verse remembering Jonson after his death
16 noted that 'Sack was the Morning, Evening of thy name'.²⁴ It is not
17 hard to imagine – as Jonson's most recent biographer, Ian Donaldson,
18 does – a candle knocked over, and then Jonson's works-in-progress,
19 and his treasured library, including books lent by friends, quickly
20 destroyed.²⁵ The image we have of Jonson's working environment is
21 of something like a tinderbox: 'no dramatist of the period,' Joseph
22 Loewenstein writes, 'so needed to surround himself with piles of books
23 of papers'.²⁶

24 The archival traces of Jonson's book fire are scant, as the paradoxi-
25 cal archive of lost things tends to be. Jonson's copy of *The Works of*
26 *Claudian* (1585) in the Bodleian Library, carries, alongside the usual
27 Jonsonian annotations (the underlinings, the symbols of flowers),
28 evidence of fire damage – perhaps, but not definitively, from 1623.
29 The fire's more visible imprint lies in Jonson's angry, riveting poem
30 of loss, 'An Execration upon Vulcan'.²⁷ Across 216 lines, during which
31 Jonson shifts from a position of bafflement ('And why to me this,
32 thou lame lord of fire?' (1)) to angry accusation and insult ('Thy wife's
33 pox on thee' (216)), Jonson defends his writing against charges that
34 it deserved destruction (no 'treason' in there, Jonson claims, a bit
35 touchily, scorched, presumably, by memories of imprisonment after
36 *The Isle of Dogs* (1597), *Sejanus* (1603) and *Eastward Ho* (1605); no
37 'heresy'; no 'witchcraft'); describes the kinds of books that might use-
38 fully be burnt (the Talmud; the Quran; newsbooks; 'the whole sum /
39 Of errant knighthood,' Jonson writes, 'with their dames and dwarves');
40 lists his lost writing; surveys other fires (the Globe; St Paul's; Ephesus;
41 the library of Alexandria); before concluding by scattering abuse in

1 Vulcan's direction. 'Pox on Your Flameship ... if it be [/] To all as fatal
2 as't hath been to me.'
3 How 'fatal' was this fire? One way to read Jonson's poem is as an attack
4 on, or a lament about, book destruction, *per se*. In this sense, the poem
5 could sit neatly within a liberal humanist narrative of the horrors of
6 bibliographical loss: a narrative that often equates book destruction
7 with the violation of 'civilization itself', and which describes (and in
8 describing also often enacts) a sense of 'deep emotion ... sadness and
9 fear'.²⁸ But just as the essays gathered in this volume draw connections
10 between book destruction and creativity, a more careful reading of
11 Jonson's poem reveals a text invested in discriminating between forms
12 of destruction: some are deplorable (like the flames that engulfed
13 Jonson's own books); others are more productive.²⁹ Seen in this light,
14 Jonson's poem becomes, at least in part, a meditation on the uses
15 of destruction, and a consideration of the necessary role of burning
16 books.

17 At the heart of the poem is Jonson's meticulous list of his works that,
18 mid-composition, were lost in the flames.

19
20 All the old Venusine in poetry,
21 And lighted by the Stagirite, could spy
22 Was there made English, with a Grammar too,
23 To teach some that their nurses could not do,
24 The purity of language. And, among
25 The rest, my journey into Scotland sung,
26 With all th'adventures; three books not afraid
27 To speak the fate of the Sicilian maid
28 To our own ladies, and in story there
29 Of our fifth Henry, eight of his nine year;
30 Wherein was oil, beside the succour spent
31 Which noble Carew, Cotton, Selden lent:
32 And twice-twelve years' stored up humanity,
33 With humble gleanings in divinity
34 After the fathers, and those wiser guides
35 Whom faction had not drawn to study sides. (89–104)
36

37 These lines – a kind of annotated bibliography of lost works – seem to
38 refer to (i) a commentary on the *Ars Poetica* by Horace (born in Venusia),
39 with a preface drawing on the *Poetics* of Aristotle (born in Stagira); (ii) an
40 English Grammar; (iii) a song describing Jonson's 1618 walk to Scotland;
41 (iv) a translation of three books of John Barclay's popular Latin prose

1 romance *Argenis*; (v) a history, of some kind, of Henry V, in part based
 2 on books lent by antiquarian friends Richard Carew, Sir Robert Cotton
 3 and Sir John Selden; and (vi) a commonplace book, 'twice-twelve-years
 4 stor'd up Humanity, / With humble Gleanings in Divinity'. Apart from
 5 a mention of 'parcels of a Play' and '[a]dulterate masquings' (line 43),
 6 this list suggests Jonson the serious scholar – recipient of an honorary
 7 Master of Arts from Oxford University in 1619 – rather more than
 8 Jonson the popular playwright.³⁰

9 How might we respond to this list of apparently lost works? One way
 10 is with a kind of bibliographical literalism: to ask whether these books
 11 ever actually existed. This is alluring, especially since such 'gaps in the
 12 literary record tantalize all the more for being so clearly labelled'.³¹
 13 Some references can be linked with later publications, or works Jonson
 14 elsewhere suggested he was writing. Two different versions of Jonson
 15 translation of Horace's *Ars Poetica* were published after his death, in
 16 1640 and 1641;³² Jonson later published an *English Grammar*; three
 17 books of his translation of *Argenis* were included in the Stationer's
 18 Register on 2 October 1623, although it seems after the fire, Jonson (in
 19 Ian Donaldson's words) 'could not bring himself to begin the transla-
 20 tion all over again', and the commission passed to Kingsmill Long,
 21 whose translation was printed in 1625;³³ and 'parcels of a Play' may
 22 refer to an early draft of *The Staple of News* (1626).³⁴ That leaves some
 23 unknowns: the commonplace book; the history of Henry V; the song
 24 about Jonson's walk to Scotland. Jonson did tell Drummond that he
 25 wanted 'to write his foot pilgrimage hither, and to call it A Discovery',
 26 and there might be further evidence emerging: in 2009 James Loxley
 27 discovered a 7,500-word prose account of Jonson's journey, written
 28 by an unknown companion, and titled 'My Gossip Joh[n]son / his
 29 foot voyage / and myne / into Scotland'. The text was found among
 30 the Aldersey family papers in the Chester Archives, and Loxley is cur-
 31 rently exploring the relationship between the putative lost song and
 32 this prose narration.³⁵ Jonson's former friend George Chapman – stung
 33 by Jonson's critical annotations in his copy of Chapman's *The Whole*
 34 *Works of Homer, Prince of Poets* (1616) – had his doubts about all of
 35 these claims: he wrote his 'Invective written against Mr. Ben Jonson' to
 36 question those works in progress obliterated in what Chapman sarcasti-
 37 cally calls 'your sacred deske / (The wooden fountayne of the Mughtye
 38 Muses)'. Did Jonson, Chapman suggests, invent these lost works to
 39 placate King James ('criing fire out In a dreame to kinges') after Jonson's
 40 honorary degree?³⁶ Was Jonson rather nervously showing James he was
 41 worth it?

Libraries of the mind

But do Jonson's books need to exist? How material does a book need to be for it be recorded as a book? With Chapman's qualifications ringing in our ears, any search for actual books needs to be qualified by the fact that Jonson may have been writing, at least partly, within the minor but established literary tradition of the imagined or fictitious library catalogue. The best-known English example is perhaps John Donne's *Catalogus librorum aulicorum incomparabilium et non vendibilium*, or *The Courtier's Library of Rare Books Not for Sale*, unpublished until 1650 but written between about 1603 and 1611, and popular in manuscript with Donne's coterie readers.³⁷ This catalogue lists 34 imaginary books from which, the joke runs, aspiring courtiers ('elite fops and layabouts', in Anne Lake Prescott's words)³⁸ may derive a kind of parody of wisdom: 'with these books at your elbow,' Donne suggests, 'you may in almost every branch of knowledge suddenly emerge as an authority'. Among Donne's titles are *Edward Hoby's Afternoon Belchings*; Martin Luther's *On shortening the Lord's Prayer*; and *The Art of copying out within the compass of a Penny all the truthful statements made to that end by John Foxe*.³⁹ Donne was perhaps inspired by Rabelais's satirical description of the imaginary Library of St Victor in Paris – Europe's 'first imaginary library'⁴⁰ – in the seventh chapter of *Pantagruel*: while Donne's target is the would-be courtier, Rabelais's satirical net is wider as he mocks popular superstition, lawyers, the Sorbonne, and – in particular – the hair-splitting of scholasticism. 'Collectively,' writes Anne Lake Prescott, Rabelais's books 'exact a humanist and evangelical revenge on enemies of the new learning'.⁴¹ Among the volumes Pantagruel finds are *The Codpiece of the Law*; *The Testes of Theology*; *On the Art of Discreetly Farting in Company*; *Martingale Breeches with Back-flaps for Turd-droppers*; and *The Elbow-rest of Old Age*.⁴²

Jonson's literary intimacy with Donne ('Who shall doubt, Donne, where I a poet bee, / When I dare send my Epigrammes to thee?')⁴³ and perhaps Rabelais suggests Jonson would have known of his mock catalogue tradition, and this complicates a desire to read Jonson's book list at face value: the verse bibliography is a verse before it is a bibliography. Prescott calls Rabelais's fictive titles 'nonbooks' or 'promises of books' – '[o]scillating between being and nonbeing, they are ... the librarian's equivalent of negative wonder'⁴⁴ – and this latter sense of intended or desired texts may catch something of Jonson's verse: this is perhaps bibliography as a to-do list, the titles not quite fictions, but hopes, things somewhere in the pipeline. 'I dare not say a body,' Jonson confesses

1 before itemising his lost works, 'but some parts / There were of search
2 and mastery in the arts' (87–8).

3 Whether or not some, or all, of Jonson's listed lost works actually
4 sat expectantly in his library on the day of the fire, they certainly all
5 acquire a life within the poem: we can be certain of this form of exist-
6 ence. For while Jonson laments that he's left with 'ruins', the fact of the
7 fire creates a kind of utopian space within the poem, in which Jonson
8 can deny bad texts which he had in fact written (like the acrostics he
9 scorns at line 39,⁴⁵ or the works deemed sufficiently seditious to land
10 him in prison), and imagine other texts that perhaps he had not. And
11 while Chapman's 'Invective' perhaps, in David Riggs's words, 'reeks of
12 envy', it neatly captures the creative logic in Jonson's poem: 'Burne
13 things vnborne,' Chapman complains, 'and that way generate things?'.
14 As Jonson himself notes, cities might flourish after the flames: 'For they
15 were burnt but to be better built' (166).⁴⁶

16 This says something important about poetry: about its capaciousness,
17 its ability to hold within its 216 lines not only Jonson's fire, but seven
18 other historic fires, from Troy, to the Fortune Theatre in 1621.⁴⁷ On a
19 formal level, then, Jonson's poem pens in Vulcan's destruction, even as
20 it describes an uncontrollable appetite: the poem's exactness stands in
21 contrast to Vulcan's unpoliced flames. There is a relationship between
22 material and literary form, too, as the loss of physical books prompts
23 into being Jonson's long but meticulously controlled verse. Jonson
24 defeats Vulcan, by turning his poem into, in part, a kind of library: an
25 alternative space in which his works can live.

27 The uses of destruction

29 Part of the point of so carefully naming his writings is to show Jonson
30 engaged in careful acts of bibliographical discrimination.⁴⁸ What
31 Jonson objects to is not destruction, but hasty, indiscriminate loss. Indeed,
32 certain kinds of books could be justifiably burnt. Had Jonson written rid-
33 dles, 'curious palindromes' (34), anagrams, shape poems, acrostics, or
34 had he 'compiled from' romances such as *Amadis de Gaul* or those in
35 'The learned library of Don Quixote', Vulcan's burning would have been
36 justified, or at least less unjustified: 'Thou then hadst had some colour
37 for thy flames' (40).⁴⁹ Jonson also introduces a second category of books
38 that, while not necessarily deserving the flames, might have stood as
39 tolerable substitutes for Jonson's own texts had he known Vulcan was
40 in the book-burning mood: 'many a ream / To redeem mine I had sent
41

1 in' (62–3). Thus: the Quran; the collection of saints' lives known as the
 2 *Legenda Aurea*; prose romances ('the whole sum of errant knighthood,
 3 with their dames and dwarves'); Arthurian legends; the stories of 'the
 4 mad Rowland and sweet Oliveers' (that is, probably, the *Chanson de*
 5 *Roland*, and Ariosto's *Orlando Furioso*); pamphlets promising alchemical
 6 magic, like (the imaginary) 'The Art of Kindling True Coal' (76); satirical
 7 texts, such as Nicholas Breton's, adopting the voice of Pasquil; fashion-
 8 ably difficult writing ('strong lines' (78)); newsbooks; prophetic texts
 9 by fanatical puritan preachers. All of these Vulcan might have burnt –
 10 or 'lick[ed] up' (84) – in preference to Jonson's texts, undeserving of
 11 destruction.

12 Jonson's preoccupation with romances as books that might tolerably
 13 be burnt echoes, and might have been directly informed by, Cervantes's
 14 *Don Quixote*, Part I, chapter 6, available in Thomas Shelton's English
 15 translation since 1612.⁵⁰ Here the priest, barber, housekeeper and niece
 16 burn most of the works on chivalry that have pushed Don Quixote into
 17 a world of fantasy. Like Jonson's narrator, Cervantes's priest carefully
 18 distinguishes between the saveable (*The Four Books of Amadis of Gaul*)
 19 and the damned (*The Exploits of Esplandian*), with a further pending
 20 category for books whose status is as yet uncertain (*Galatea*, by Miguel
 21 de Cervantes). The offending books are condemned primarily for the
 22 damaging delusions they convey (what the niece calls the 'chivalry
 23 illness'), but also because of literary failings ('*Florismarte of Hyrcania ...*
 24 [is] soon going to end up in the yard [on the fire] ... given the clumsi-
 25 ness and dullness of his style') – rather as, in Jonson's *Every Man In His*
 26 *Humour*, Justice Clement calls for the burning of the bad, plagiarised
 27 verses of the pot-poet Matheo.⁵¹ The priest burns poetry, too, despite
 28 some initial doubts ('these are books for the intellect, and do nobody
 29 any harm'): one of the few things worse than a deluded knight-errant
 30 is a deluded poet ('a catching and incurable disease').⁵² This connection
 31 with *Don Quixote* is a reminder that Jonson's poem is not simply, or
 32 only, a catalogue of real books, but rather a literary work operating in a
 33 tradition of what we might call ludic bibliography: as much Jorge Luis
 34 Borges as Donald Goddard Wing.

35 Jonson's poem is not, then, a condemnation of book destruction, but
 36 rather a call for certain kinds of books (namely, his own) to be preserved.
 37 To formulate that rather more sharply: Jonson's poem is a belated plea
 38 for certain kinds of books (like romances) to be burnt instead of his own;
 39 and, more broadly, for destruction to play a trimming, quasi-editorial
 40 role in the construction of the aesthetic and bibliographical category we
 41

1 call 'literature'. The 'Execration' might thus be read as a meditation on
2 the uses of destruction for the preservation of books.

3 Jonson defends destruction in part by evoking state-sponsored biblio-
4 cide as a justifiable opposite to the injustice of his own indiscriminate
5 loss: 'Had I wrote treason . . . / I had deserved then thy consuming
6 looks; / Perhaps to have been burned with my books' (15–18). By
7 denying accusations of sedition in his own burnt writings ('Did I there
8 wound the honour of the crown?' (23)), Jonson posits the burning of
9 treasonous texts as legitimate, or legitimate in comparison with Vulcan's
10 flames, even while Jonson himself was a victim of such punitive acts.

11 This notion of justifiable book burning has a long history. It receives
12 scriptural sanction in the Acts of Apostles, 19:19–20, where Paul's
13 presence in Ephesus causes sorcerers to burn their books. Indeed,
14 the biblical text describes a causal link between this purposeful (but,
15 as John Milton notes in *Areopagitica*, crucially *voluntary*, and so not
16 magistrate-imposed)⁵³ book burning and the spread of Christianity:
17 'Many of them also which used curious arts brought their books
18 together, and burned them before all men ... So mightily grew the
19 word of God and prevailed.'⁵⁴ In Marlowe's *Doctor Faustus*, Faustus's
20 desperate final-minute appeal to the Devils who have come to take
21 his life – 'Ugly hell, gape not! Come not, Lucifer! / I'll burn my books!
22 Ah, Mephistopheles!' – looks like a last-ditch attempt to appease this
23 fate by destroying his books in this tradition of virtuous bibliocide.⁵⁵
24 But Faustus is too late, and the final scene of the 1616 B-text (but not
25 the 1604 A-text) follows this prospect of the potentially ameliorat-
26 ing destruction of a necromantic corpus with the actual destruction
27 of Faustus' 'mangled' corpse: 'See, here are Faustus' limbs / All torn
28 asunder by the hand of death.'⁵⁶ While early modern culture repeat-
29 edly imagined, prescribed, doubted and worried about the relationship
30 between body and book, particularly in moments of crisis – Foxe's
31 *Book of Martyrs*, for example, is a book of burning bodies which often
32 hold books and out of whose mouths scrolls of text unfold – Faustus's
33 attempt to substitute his books for his body fails: body and text are
34 almost, but not quite equivalent, rather as Milton's famous 'as good
35 almost kill a man as kill a good book' nearly but doesn't exactly make
36 the two terms fungible.⁵⁷

37 Jonson's particular objection is to Vulcan's indiscriminate consumption.
38 There is a problem of speed.⁵⁸ Vulcan's 'greedy flame' burns everything
39 'in an hour', without stopping to think, and is the bad other to the First
40 Folio's careful reader, who will (in words Jonson himself may have writ-
41 ten) 'Reade him, therefore; and againe, and againe'.⁵⁹ Jonson's creativity

1 is proudly sluggish: these texts were '[s]o many my years' labours',
 2 and their volume is measured in time. By inverting that Renaissance
 3 commonplace that figured good reading as moderate digestion –
 4 in *Poetaster*, Virgil instructs Crispinus to 'take / Each Morning of old
 5 Cato's Principles... / Till it be well digested: Then come home, / And
 6 taste a piece of Terence'⁶⁰ – Jonson describes Vulcan as a kind of aberrant,
 7 gorging, eroticised appetite, 'ravenous and vast', compelled to perse-
 8 cute writers due to his disappointed hopes of marrying Minerva. Books
 9 become 'a meal for Vulcan to lick up', 'a feast ... Especially in paper'
 10 (60–1), 'ravished all hence in a minute's rage'.

11 The link between time and creativity – and, more particularly,
 12 between slowness and creativity – preoccupied Jonson. His rather tetchy
 13 assertion in *Volpone* that 'five weeks fully penn'd it, / From his own
 14 hand', sounds like an answer to a prior charge of tardiness, and Thomas
 15 Dekker's *Satiromastix* (1602) presents Horace, a thinly-disguised Jonson,
 16 composing verse with a costive difficulty: Horace is 'sitting in a study
 17 behinde a Curtaine, a candle by him burning, bookes lying confusedly',
 18 as he battles to find rhymes for 'an *Epithalamium* for Sir *Walter Terrels*
 19 wedding' ('Immortall name, game, dame, tame, lame, lame, lame ...').⁶¹
 20 Elsewhere Jonson seems committed to writing as a measured labour
 21 that shouldn't flow too fast: writing as the necessary difficulty that
 22 eventually produces what Joseph Loewenstein calls the 'rambling ease'
 23 of Jonson's finished work.⁶² In his poem on Shakespeare in the First
 24 Folio, Jonson describes the process of writing poetry in terms of craft
 25 and work: he

26
 27 Who casts to write a living line, must sweat,
 28 (Such as thine are) and strike the second heat
 29 Upon the muses' anvil: turn the same,
 30 (And himself with it) that he thinks to frame;
 31 Or for the laurel, he may gain a scorn,
 32 For a good poet's made, as well as born.
 33 And such wert thou.⁶³
 34

35 This is the Jonson who 'wrought sometime,' according to Aubrey, 'with
 36 his father-in-lawe [a bricklayer], and particularly on the Garden-wall
 37 of Lincoln's-Inn next to Chancery-lane'.⁶⁴ His discourse of creativity is
 38 powerfully shaped by a language of slow, meticulous production. Pot
 39 poets write quickly ('common rhymers pour forth verses'), but slow
 40 labour is a mark of good work: 'if it comes in a year or two, it is well ...
 41 things wrote with labour deserve to be so read'. A poet does not

1 'leap forth suddenly ... by dreaming he hath ... washed his lips ... in
2 Helicon'.⁶⁵

3 Slowness, then; and a commitment also to a kind of anti-fluency,
4 to creative set-backs: if writing is a struggle, Jonson advised, 'cast not
5 away the quills yet, nor scratch the wainscot, beat not the poor desk,
6 but bring all to the forge and file again; torn it anew'.⁶⁶ We see this
7 coupling of literary quality with things struck out in Jonson's com-
8 plicated assessment of his great other, Shakespeare. 'I remember the
9 players have often mentioned it as an honor to Shakespeare,' Jonson
10 wrote,

11
12 that in his writing, whatsoever he penned, he never blotted out line.
13 My answer hath been, 'Would he had blotted a thousand' ... Which
14 they thought a malevolent speech ... [But] I loved the man, and do
15 honor his memory on this side idolatry as much as any. He was,
16 indeed, honest, and of an open and free nature; had an excellent fan-
17 tasy, brave notions, and gentle expressions; wherein he flowed with
18 that facility that sometime it was necessary he should be stopped.
19 'Sufflaminandus erat,' ['he should have been clogged'] as Augustus
20 said of Haterius.⁶⁷

21
22 We might imagine that blotting and burning exist on a continuum:
23 they are both ways of deleting to write; the necessary acts of destruction
24 or forgetting that lie within literary productivity. Shakespeare would
25 have been so much better had he written less: at least according to
26 Jonson's account. And it's true that Shakespeare's most celebrated mid-
27 career plays (*Hamlet*; *Lear*; *Macbeth*) are marked by the absence, the cut-
28 ting away, of explanation, motive, dialogue: an aesthetic of unknowns
29 and gaps and things not burnt away but, perhaps, as Jonson would have
30 said, blotted out.

31 If Jonson's poem establishes a relationship between loss and crea-
32 tivity, then a similar dynamic of necessary destruction – of a kind of
33 discriminating forgetfulness – often characterises acts of book collect-
34 ing, and library building, in Reformation England. Jonson was writing
35 about his 1623 fire, but was also catching something circulating more
36 broadly in his culture, and in the culture of previous generations.
37 When John Leland described *The Laborious Journey and Serche ... for*
38 *Englandes Antiquities* under Henry VIII, he and his editor, John Bale,
39 found themselves in an awkward moral position: applauding the mon-
40 arch for dissolving the monasteries – Leland called them 'sodometrouse'
41

Abbeyes & Fryeryes' – but lamenting that 'lytle respecte was had to theyr lybraryes'.⁶⁸ Leland lingers, painfully, over the fate of books once in monastery libraries:

some [are used by the plunderers] to scoure theyr iakes, some to scoure theyr candelstyckes, & some to rubbe their bootes. Some they solde to the grossers and sope sellers, + some they sent ouer see to y^e bokebynders, not in small nombre, but at tymes whole shyppes full, to the wonderynge of the foren nacyons ... I knowe of a merchaunt man, whych shall at thys tyme be namelesse, that broughte the contentes of two noble lybraryes for xl shyillynges pryce, a shame it is to be spoken. Thys stuffe hath he occupied in the stede of graye paper by the space of more than these x yeares, + yet he hath store ynough for as many yeares to come.⁶⁹

What should a Protestant bibliophile do with books and manuscripts from 'sodometrouse ... Fryeryes'? Bale responds with a rhetoric, and a methodology, of weeding out: he 'wyshed (and I scaresly utter it wythout teares) that the profytable corne had not so unaduysedly and ungodly peryshed wyth the unprofytable chaffe'.⁷⁰ The process of collecting was, Leland wrote, a process of 'casting away trifles, cutting off olde wiues tales, and superfluous fables' from those texts one should 'reade, scanne upon, and preserve in memorie'.⁷¹

As Jennifer Summit has argued in *Memory's Library*, Reformation library building was about constructing a particular version of a national past that required the throwing out of many texts. Libraries were concerned, in Summit's terms, with making memory, not preserving it, rather as Robert Cotton, a century later, unbound, reordered, and cut apart gathered manuscripts in pursuit of a particular version of English history: signs not of a curatorial slackness or indifference but rather of a working library, built to serve particular ends.⁷² Summit suggests we see this sense of a 'perennially fragmentary, incomplete ... post-Reformation archive' playing out in a literary aesthetic of 'silences and gaps over comprehensiveness and totality'.⁷³ Thus in Book 2 of Spenser's *Faerie Queene*, in a description of memory's library, Arthur reads a history of Britain but finds the final page torn out (something which generates in Arthur a sense of 'secret pleasure'), and Guyon turns the leaves of a history of faerie land but the volume has no end.⁷⁴

Too many books

Despite the fact that the Earl of Pembroke gave Jonson £20 each new year to buy books, William Drummond reported that ‘Sundry tymes [he] [Jonson] heth devoured his books’: by which he meant ‘sold th[em] all for Necessity’.⁷⁵ That’s why lots of Jonson-owned books also have other signatures on them, like John Selden’s: Jonson sold them on, to pay the rent, or the bar tab. Drummond’s use of ‘devour’ – ‘Sundry tymes he heth *devoured* his books’ – reminds us of that overlap, in early modern discourse, between eating, reading and destroying. Devour means all these things. It’s also the verb Jonson uses to describe Vulcan’s rampage through his library (‘thy greedy flame thus to devour / So many my years’ labours in an hour?’ (3–4)). To read passionately and intensely was perilously close to an act of destruction.

But perhaps ‘perilously’ is a wrong, and anachronistic term. Today we’re inclined to see the loss of old books as unfortunate, or even tragic, but early modern bibliophiles were quite happy for most texts to go the way of the pie dish, or the privy, or the vegetable market. Thomas Bodley was careful to exclude ‘idle books, & riffe raffes’,⁷⁶ including plays, from his library, and many commentators felt there were simply too many titles in the world – ‘a vast *Chaos* and confusion of bookes’, according to Robert Burton, for which ‘the longest life of a man’, lamented John Cotgrave, ‘is not sufficient to explore so much as the substance of them, which (in many) is but slender’.⁷⁷ We see a similar sense of exhaustion, and lament, voiced by Memoria (‘An old decrepit man, in a black Velvet Cassock’) in Thomas Tomkis’s *Lingua: or, The combate of the tongue, and the fūe sences for superioritie* (1607).⁷⁸ Able to recall watching Socrates being ‘abused most greatly’ at ‘a Comedy of *Aristophanes making*’ (‘It is now, let me see, about 1800 years ago’), Memoria is absent-minded in the present: ‘I forgot my spectacles, I left them in the 349. page of *Hall’s Chronicles*, where he tells a great wonder of a multitude of Mice’.⁷⁹ And Memoria voices despair that contemporary texts are charged with remembering too much: that seventeenth-century culture is burdened with too much text.

I remember in the age of *Assaracus* and *Ninus*, and about the warres of *Thebes*, and the siege of *Troy*, there were few things committed to my charge, but those that were well-worthy the preserving, but now euery trifle must be wrapt up in the volume of Eternity. A rich pudding-wife, or a Cobler cannot die but I must immortalize his

Name with an Epitaph: A dog cannot pisse in a Noblemans shoe,
but it must be sprinkled into the Chronicles, so that I never could
remember my Treasure more full, and never emptier of Honourable,
and true Heroicall actions.⁸⁰

Thus careful reading was figured as a kind of profitable destruction: an
act of discrimination that, recalling the Latin *legere*, plucked out the few
worthy titles while leaving the rest (the chap books, the pamphlets, the
bad plays) to the consuming looks of fire. When Lucius Cary celebrated
Jonson's 'exact' literary 'judgement', he suggested that had we Jonson's
reading notes, it wouldn't matter if everything else was lost: an index
of Jonson's literary worth was, Cary implies, the bibliographical loss it
might enable.

His *Learning* such, no *Author* old nor new,
Escapt his reading that deserv'd his view,
And such his *Iudgement*, so exact his *Test*,
Of what was best in *Bookes*, as what *bookes* best,
That had he joyn'd those notes his Labours tooke,
From each most prais'd and praise-deserving *Booke*,
And could the world of that choise *Treasure* boast,
It need not care though all the rest were lost[.]⁸¹

Notes

1. John Donne on *Biathanatos*, letter to Robert Ker, April 1619, in *Complete Poetry and Selected Prose*, ed. John Hayward (New York: Nonesuch Press, 1929), p. 470.
2. Anne Lake Prescott, *Imagining Rabelais in Renaissance England* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998), p. 175.
3. Leonard Digges, 'To the Memorie of the deceased Author Maister W. Shakespeare', in *Shakespeare's Comedies, Histories, & Tragedies* (1623), sig. A7r.
4. Ben Jonson, 'To the memory of my beloved, The Author, Mr. William Shakespeare', in *Shakespeare's Comedies, Histories, & Tragedies*, sig. A4.
5. Tessa Watt, *Cheap Print and Popular Piety, 1550–1640* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), p. 141.
6. John Taylor, *All the workes* (1630), p. 72.
7. Margaret Spufford, *Small Books and Pleasant Histories: Popular Fiction and Its Readership in Seventeenth-Century England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), p. 48.
8. *The Booke of The Common Prayer* (1549) Lambeth Palace Library H5145.A2 (1549), with end-papers from *An Almanack and Pronosticacion* [sic] *for the yeare*

- 1 of oure Lorde M.D. and xlviij (1548). F. H. Stubbings, 'A Cambridge Pocket-
- 2 Diary, 1587–92', *Transactions of the Cambridge Bibliographical Society*, V (1971):
- 3 191–202, p. 192, notes that fragments of Gabriel Frende's *Almanacke and*
- 4 *Prognostication* (1591) survive 'in the binding of a book at Shrewsbury School'.
- 5 9. Folger Shakespeare Library STC 22611.8. See also Strickland Gibson, 'Old
- 6 Bindings as Literary Hunting-Grounds', in *The Academy* 1748 (4 November
- 7 1905), Illustrated Supplement, 1–4.
- 8 10. Thomas Nashe, *Unfortunate Traveller* (1594), in *An Anthology of Elizabethan*
- 9 *Prose Fiction*, ed. Paul Salzman (Oxford: Oxford University Press), p. 208.
- 10 11. Leah Price, *How to Do Things with Books in Victorian Britain* (Princeton:
- 11 Princeton University Press, 2012).
- 12 12. Eustace F. Bosanquet, *English Printed Almanacks and Prognostications: A*
- 13 *Bibliographical History to the Year 1600* (London: Chiswick Press, 1917), p. 42.
- 14 13. William Shakespeare, *Sonnets*, ed. Katherine Duncan-Jones (London: Arden,
- 15 2010), no. 19, p. 149. See also sonnets 54, 71 and 81.
- 16 14. For more on the experience of researching while recognising how much of
- 17 the past does not survive, see Thomas Fulton, *Historical Milton: Manuscript,*
- 18 *Print and Political Culture in Revolutionary England* (Amherst: University of
- 19 Massachusetts Press, 2010), chapter 1, esp. pp. 15–16 and 21–2.
- 20 15. David Cressy, 'Book Burning in Tudor and Stuart England', *The Sixteenth*
- 21 *Century Journal* 36(2) (Summer 2005): 359–74; Ariel Hessayon, 'Incendiary
- 22 Texts: Book Burning in England, c.1640–c.1660', *Cromohs* 12 (2007): 1–25:
- 23 <http://www.cromohs.unifi.it/12_2007/hessayon_incendtexts.html>.
- 24 16. Brian Cummings, 'Iconoclasm and Bibliophobia in the English Reformation,
- 25 1521–1558', in Jeremy Dimmick, James Simpson and Nicholette Zeeman
- 26 (eds), *Images, Idolatry, and Iconoclasm in Late Medieval England: Textuality*
- 27 *and the Visual Image* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), pp. 185–206,
- 28 p. 200.
- 29 17. John Foxe, *Actes and Monuments* (1563), p. 1629.
- 30 18. Alan Macfarlane, *The Family Life of Ralph Josselin: A Seventeenth-Century*
- 31 *Clergyman* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970), p. 26.
- 32 19. Hessayon, 'Incendiary Texts', p. 23. See also Cummings, 'Iconoclasm and
- 33 Bibliophobia', pp. 200–2.
- 34 20. *Sejanus His Fall*, in *The Cambridge Edition of the Works of Ben Jonson*, general
- 35 editors David Bevington, Martin Butler and Ian Donaldson (Cambridge:
- 36 Cambridge University Press, 2012), 7 vols, vol. 2, ed. Tom Cain, pp. 197–391,
- 37 3.469, 471–4, 478, 480. Discussed in Ian Donaldson, *Ben Jonson: A Life*
- 38 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), pp. 188–9.
- 39 21. 'A note of one Thomas sommers prisoned for the Gospell', in John Foxe,
- 40 *Acts and Monuments*. See also Cummings, 'Iconoclasm and Bibliophobia',
- 41 pp. 202–3.
22. For a modern analogue, see accounts of the fire that destroyed the library of
- the author Francis Wheen in April 2012. While Jonson's response to his fire
- was to write an angry poem, Wheen said he would simply 'sit in the lotus
- position and contemplate the four noble truths': <[http://www.independent.](http://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/books/news/bonfire-of-the-first-editions-author-loses-lifes-work-in-garden-shed-fire-7646612.html)
- [co.uk/arts-entertainment/books/news/bonfire-of-the-first-editions-author-](http://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/books/news/bonfire-of-the-first-editions-author-loses-lifes-work-in-garden-shed-fire-7646612.html)
- [loses-lifes-work-in-garden-shed-fire-7646612.html](http://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/books/news/bonfire-of-the-first-editions-author-loses-lifes-work-in-garden-shed-fire-7646612.html)>.
23. John Aubrey, *Brief Lives*, ed. Michael Hunter (London: Penguin, 2000),
- pp. 170–5, 172. For more on Jonson's creative practices, see Adam Smyth

- and Michelle O'Callaghan, 'Tavern and Library: Working with Ben Jonson', in Ceri Sullivan and Graeme Harper (eds), *Authors at Work: The Creative Environment* (Suffolk: Boydell and Brewer, 2009), pp. 155–71.
24. *Informations to William Drummond of Hawthornden*, in *Cambridge Edition*, vol. 5, ed. Ian Donaldson, pp. 353–91, p. 391; 'Verses written over the Chair of Ben: Johnson, now remaining at Robert Wilsons, at the signe of Johnson's head in the Strand', in *Wit and Drollery* (1656), pp. 79–80.
25. Donaldson, *Jonson*, p. 367. The extent of this fire is disputed: Mark Bland, 'Ben Jonson and the Legacies of the Past', *Huntington Library Quarterly* 67 (2004): 371–400, says Jonson's reference to his 'desk' (l. 85) suggests a small fire (392), and argues that the 'escalation of the fire among Jonson's papers to a conflagration of his library' can be traced to W. Gifford's 1816 edition of *The Works of Ben Jonson* (391, fn. 91). For counter-views suggesting a large fire, see Ian Donaldson, 'Jonson, Shakespeare, and the Destruction of the Book', in *Jonson's Magic Houses: Essays in Interpretation* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997), pp. 198–216; and Marcus Nevitt, 'Ben Jonson and the Serial Publication of News', *Media History* 11 (2005): 53–68, which describes the 'catastrophic' event of 'the wholesale destruction of Ben Jonson's library' (53). As Donaldson sensibly concludes, '[i]t is impossible to know how trivial or serious an event the fire of 1632 actually was' (*Life*, p. 368). Jonson was the victim of a later fire, too: neighbour and literary son James Howell wrote, perhaps unreliably, of rescuing him from a similar blaze some years later, 'this being the second time that Vulcan hath threatened you': see Howell, *Epistolae Ho-Eliauae* (1645), section 5, xvii, 22–3. Noted in Donaldson, *Life*, p. 368.
26. Joseph Loewenstein, 'Personal Material: Jonson and Book Burning', in Martin Butler (ed.), *Re-presenting Ben Jonson: Text, History, Performance* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1999), pp. 93–113, p. 99.
27. 'An Execration upon Vulcan', in *The Underwood*, no. 43, in *Cambridge Edition*, vol. 7, ed. Colin Burrow, pp. 94–108. Line numbers to the poem will be given parenthetically in the main text. I have found Burrow's notes extremely helpful in the writing of this chapter. The poem was first published by John Benson in 1640.
28. Rebecca Knuth, *Libricide: The Regime-Sponsored Destruction of Books and Libraries in the Twentieth Century* (Westport: Praeger, 2003), p. 1.
29. In this sense I am disagreeing with Ian Donaldson's argument that "An Execration upon Vulcan" marks Jonson's attempt to assert, through the printed word, his capacity for survival when faced with the ultimate test, the destruction of his writings.' Donaldson, 'Jonson, Shakespeare, and the Destruction of the Book', p. 214.
30. Donaldson, *Life*, p. 369.
31. James Loxley, 'My Gossip's Foot Voyage: A Recently Discovered Manuscript Sheds New Light on Ben Jonson's Walk to Edinburgh', *Times Literary Supplement*, no. 5554 (11 September 2009): 13–15, p. 13.
32. For these identifications, see Burrow, *The Underwood*, pp. 100–1.
33. Donaldson, *Jonson*, p. 369.
34. G. B. Johnston, 'Notes on Jonson's Execration Upon Vulcan', *MLN* 46(3) (1931): 150–3, makes this suggestion by noting that lines 79–84 of 'Execration' reference several subjects discussed satirically in the play.

- 1 35. Loxley is currently producing an annotated edition of the account, with Julie
2 Sanders and Anna Groundwater. Loxley, 'Ben Jonson's Walk'.
- 3 36. George Chapman, 'Invective written against Mr. Ben Jonson', in *The Poems of*
4 *George Chapman*, ed. Phyllis Brooks Bartlett (Oxford: Oxford University Press,
5 1941), pp. 374–8. Chapman's poem is in Bod MS Ashmole 38.
- 6 37. Piers Brown, "'Hac ex consilio meo via progredieris": Courtly Reading
7 and Secretarial Mediation in Donne's *The Courtier's Library*', *Renaissance*
8 *Quarterly* 61(3) (Fall 2008): 833–66, p. 833.
- 9 38. Prescott, *Imagining Rabelais*, p. 175.
- 10 39. John Donne, *The Courtier's Library, or Catalogus Librorum Aulicorum incom-*
11 *parabilium et non vendibilium*, ed. and trans. Evelyn Mary Simpson (London:
12 Nonesuch Press, 1930), pp. 42, 50, 46, 44, 43.
- 13 40. Prescott, *Imagining Rabelais*, p. 168.
- 14 41. Prescott, *Imagining Rabelais*, p. 168.
- 15 42. François Rabelais, *Gargantua and Pantagruel*, ed. and trans. M. A. Screech
16 (London: Penguin, 2006), pp. 39–44. Rabelais's list of books inspired the
17 inclusion of similar non-books in the margins of John Healey's *Discovery*
18 *of a New World* (c.1609), a translation of Joseph Hall's *Mundus alter et*
19 *idem*. Prescott, *Imagining Rabelais*, pp. 170–3. Note also Thomas Browne's
20 'Musæum Clausum, or Bibliotheca Abscondita: containing some remarkable
21 Books, Antiquities, Pictures and Rarities of several kinds, scarce or never seen
22 by any man now loving', in *Certain Miscellany Tracts* (1683), tract 13. As
23 noted by Simpson, *Courtier's Library*, p. 54, in the mid-seventeenth century,
24 imagined library catalogues became a means to articulate political satire: see,
25 for instance, *Bibliotheca Fanatica* (1660) and *A Catalogue of Books, of the new-*
26 *est Fashion, To be sold by Auction at the Whig's Coffee-House at the Sign of the*
27 *Jackanapes in Prating Alley* (1693).
- 28 43. Ben Jonson, 'To John Donne', in *Epigrammes*, no. 96, in *Cambridge Edition*,
29 vol. 5, ed. Colin Burrow, p. 163.
- 30 44. Prescott, *Imagining Rabelais*, pp. 167, 168.
- 31 45. See, for example, Jonson's 'On Margaret Ratcliffe', in *Epigrammes*, no. 40, in
32 *Cambridge Edition*, vol. 5, ed. Colin Burrow, p. 131.
- 33 46. David Riggs, *Ben Jonson: A Life* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press,
34 1989), p. 289.
- 35 47. Fires referenced, in chronological order, are Troy (c.1260–40 BCE); Ephesus
36 (356 BCE); Alexandria (640 CE); St Paul's Steeple (1561); the Globe Theatre
37 (1613); Whitehall Banqueting House (1619); the archives at Chancery
38 (1621); and the Fortune Theatre (1621).
- 39 48. Loewenstein notes that Jonson 'sets up a contrast between Vulcan's
40 indiscriminate *consumption* and his own discriminating literary *taste*'.
- 41 49. Loewenstein, 'Personal Material', p. 100.
- 50 49. '[C]omplied from' suggests merely reorganised ('assembled', in Burrow's
51 words) existing parts in a version of authorship, Jonson implies, common to
52 romance writers.
50. Loewenstein, 'Personal Material', pp. 100–2.
51. Discussed in Donaldson, 'Jonson, Shakespeare, and the Destruction of the
Book', pp. 202–3.
52. Miguel de Cervantes Saavedra, *The Ingenious Hidalgo Don Quixote de la Mancha*,
trans. John Rutherford (London: Penguin, 2000), pp. 54, 56.

- 1 53. John Milton, *Areopagitica*, in *The Major Works*, ed. Stephen Orgel and
- 2 Jonathan Goldberg (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), p. 247.
- 3 54. Kings James Bible. Noted and discussed in James Kearney, *The Incarnate*
- 4 *Text: Imagining the Book in Reformation England* (Philadelphia: University of
- 5 Pennsylvania Press, 2009), p. 177.
- 6 55. Christopher Marlowe, *Doctor Faustus*, ed. David Scott Kastan (New York and
- 7 London: W. W. Norton, 2005), 5.2.115–16. Kearney, *Incarnate Text*, p. 177,
- 8 argues that Faustus's burning is not a simple renunciation, but is also in part
- 9 a kind of sacrifice, and so a celebration of the power of necromantic books.
- 10 Faustus's final offer of burning is thus unstable in terms of its signification.
- 11 56. Marlowe, *Faustus*, 5.3.17, 6–7.
- 12 57. Milton, *Areopagitica*, p. 240.
- 13 58. Nevitt, 'Serial Publication', 54–5.
- 14 59. For Jonson as the potential author of parts of 'To the Great Variety of
- 15 Readers' in the First Folio, see Donaldson, *Life*, pp. 371–4.
- 16 60. Ben Jonson, *Poetaster*, in *Cambridge Edition*, vol. 2, ed. Gabriele Bernhard
- 17 Jackson, 5.3.473–7.
- 18 61. Thomas Dekker, *Satiromastix*, in *The Dramatic Works of Thomas Dekker*, 4 vols,
- 19 vol. I, ed. Fredson Bowers (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1953),
- 20 I.2, p. 316.
- 21 62. Loewenstein, 'Personal Material', p. 99.
- 22 63. Ben Jonson, 'To the Memory of My Beloved, The Author Master William
- 23 Shakespeare And What He Hath Left Us', in *Cambridge Edition*, vol. 5, ed.
- 24 Colin Burrow, pp. 638–42, p. 641.
- 25 64. Aubrey, *Brief Lives*, p. 171.
- 26 65. Ben Jonson, *Timber: or Discoveries* (1641), in *Cambridge Edition*, vol. 7, ed.
- 27 Lorna Hutson, pp. 483–596, p. 583.
- 28 66. Jonson, *Timber*, p. 582.
- 29 67. Jonson, *Timber*, pp. 521–2.
- 30 68. *The Laborious Journey and Serche of Johan Leylande, for Englandes Antiquitees*,
- 31 *geuen of hym as a newe yeares gyfte to Kynge Henry the viii in the xxxvii yeare of*
- 32 *his Reygne, with declaracyons enlarged: by John Bale* (1549), sigs. A2v, A7v.
- 33 69. *Laborious Journey*, sig. B1r–v.
- 34 70. *Laborious Journey*, sig. A7v.
- 35 71. Quoted in Jennifer Summit, *Memory's Library: Medieval Books in Early Modern*
- 36 *England* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2008), p. 129.
- 37 72. Kevin Sharpe, *Sir Robert Cotton, 1586–1631: History and Politics in Early*
- 38 *Modern England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979), p. 68.
- 39 73. Summit, *Memory's Library*, p. 127.
- 40 74. Edmund Spenser, *The Faerie Queene*, ed. A. C. Hamilton (Harlow: Pearson, 2007),
- 41 Book II, canto X, stanzas 68, 70, pp. 258–9. Summit, *Memory's Library*, p. 127.
75. *Informations*, p. 376. Discussed in Donaldson, 'Jonson, Shakespeare, and the
- Destruction of the Book', pp. 199–200.
76. Wheeler, *Letters of Sir Thomas Bodley*, p. 319. Cited and discussed in Eric N.
- Lindquist, 'Books and the "Iniquitie or Wearing of Time"', in *Who Wants*
- Yesterday's Papers?: Essays on the Research Value of Printed Materials in the*
- Digital Age*, ed. Yvonne Carignan et al. (Oxford: Scarecrow Press, 2005),
- pp. 5–22, p. 16. Lindquist's chapter considers the theme of the burden of
- too many books.

54 Adam Smyth

- 1 77. Robert Burton, *The Anatomy of Melancholy* (1621), pp. 8–9; John Cotgrave,
2 *The English Treasury of Wit and Language* (1655), 'To the Courteous READER'.
- 3 78. Thomas Tomkis, *Lingua: or, The combate of the tongue, and the fiue senses for*
4 *superioritie. A pleasant comoedie* (1657), sig. C5.
- 5 79. Tomkis, *Lingua*, sig. D7v.
- 6 80. Tomkis, *Lingua*, sig. C6.
- 7 81. Lucius Cary, Lord Falkland, 'An Eclogue on the Death of Ben Jonson,
8 between Melybaeus and Hylas', in *Jonsonus Virbius, or, The Memorie of Ben:*
9 *Johnson* (1638), pp. 1–9, p. 4.
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Part II
Mutilating

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Proof



3

From Books to Skoob; Or, Media Theory with a Circular Saw

Gill Partington

In spring 1967, in a basement on the Charing Cross Road, books were turning into something else:

A paper bicycle was ridden in a space occupied by three paper balloons of about 24" diameter. The bicycle avoided the balloons at first but began to hit and finally burst them, releasing water. There were some machines disguised as printed paper, one that sawed up a book, while another vibrated deafeningly from inside more newspaper with a book in front of it shaking ... Latham's film material *Talk and Speak* was projected continuously as books were being sawn upon a circular saw; giving an intermittent, amplified soundtrack. A girl was covered up in the end wall where the screening was, layers of newspaper being stuck across her. She had a long green plastic tube for communication ... The film continued as pipes and balloons and people were all connected up variously and the structure was gradually blown open and polythene tubing and large balloons took over the scene.¹

For four consecutive Saturdays during April, the artist John Latham commandeered the basement of Better Books, inviting collaborators and spectators to be part of the loosely scripted, multi-media anarchy of something known as *Book Plumbing*.² The phrase itself suggested some incongruous possibilities, presenting the book in an unfamiliar and peculiarly mechanical light; part of a wider, interconnected system. If, as Latham declared, 'language is only one pipe out of five possible ones that put us in touch with what is going on', then he seemed intent on exploring the ways in which writing might intersect with other kinds of 'pipe'.³ The room, its every visible surface strewn with books and



Figure 3.1 John Latham, 'Book Plumbing' (photo: Jennifer Pike)

newsprint, was a tangle of criss-crossing conduits of varying descriptions; 'air blowers', a 'book pipe', a 'PVC voice pipe', and 'a twenty-foot length of polythene tubing filled with plaster of Paris and books ... like a giant tape worm'.⁴ The basement was witness to every imaginable configuration, as Latham plumbed books into machines, into each other, and even into humans. They were forced into collision with an array of substances, materials, forces and processes; they were pumped full of polyurethane foam, cut up with a circular saw, set in gelatine and covered in melting lard.⁵ They were being deformed, distended, dismembered and transformed (Figure 3.1). But into what exactly?

For Latham, these new entities were 'skoob' – the concept at the heart of his lifelong preoccupation with the book, its parameters and its possibilities. The precise nature and purpose of this transformation is the subject of what follows, but there were many other techniques he employed to effect it, varying in their degrees of violence and convolution. In September the previous year he had set fire to towers of books

1 outside the British Museum and detonated a pile of encyclopaedias
2 off the Portobello Road. He had also lately chewed a copy of Clement
3 Greenberg's *Art and Culture*, which he was in the process of distilling
4 into liquid form. In fact, over the course of a long career, Latham mutilated and maimed hundreds if not thousands of printed volumes: He
5 charred them, glued them shut, cut them in half, fused them to one
6 another, painted over their pages, dissolved them with acid, encased
7 them in plaster and immersed them in a tank of live piranha fish. He
8 even invented a new art form: the 'book relief', or wall-hung assemblage
9 of charred, mangled books, which became his trademark. Latham visited almost every conceivable indignity upon the book, in other words.
10 Yet despite this, and the prominent role he played in the *Destruction in Art Symposium* in 1966, his aim was never destruction *per se*. His agenda
11 was quite distinct from that of the symposium's organiser, Gustav Metzger, whose manifestos declared the necessity of 'auto-destructive
12 art' as both iconoclastic protest and psychosocial catharsis.⁶ Latham
13 enjoyed the pyrotechnics and provocation of destruction as public
14 spectacle, conspicuously focusing his attentions on encyclopaedias, art
15 historical and legal texts as visible emblems of establishment. But his
16 purpose was to subvert and reinvent rather than obliterate it. Spelling
17 the word backwards signalled the fact that, whatever else Latham did to
18 books, his aim in the first instance was a kind of temporal derangement;
19 an intervention into the time of the book.

20 The location of his 'skoob tower' burnings, held the previous
21 September, was carefully chosen in this respect.⁷ He ignited his flimsy,
22 temporary stacks of books and metal outside the British Museum,
23 with its Elgin Marbles and Caryatids, its weighty sculpture and even
24 weightier History. But they were also caught between two monoliths of
25 bookish culture: the Museum's domed reading room and the hulking
26 presence of Senate House, the University of London library building.
27 The towers were part book, part sculpture; a hybrid whose ephemerality
28 subverted the permanence and monumentality of both. Directly outside the enduring stone edifice of the cultural and academic institution,
29 they were ready-mades whose purpose was precisely to disintegrate into
30 ashes. Latham referred to them as 'negative sculpture', or 'reverse-order
31 sculpture'.⁸ But it was not simply an inversion or reversal of time he
32 was after. The temporal disruptions of *Book Plumbing* show that the
33 transformation he envisaged involved something more complicated
34 than merely sending books backwards. Upstairs in the bookshop, interactions with literature might be dictated by the attentive, slow, human
35 time of reading, but down in the basement books were out of their



Figure 3.2 John Latham, 'The Laws of England' (photo: Jennifer Pike)

accustomed place and time. They were shunted off the shelf onto the floor by inflating envelopes and subject to continual process and conflicting time signatures. What set the book in motion wasn't the turning of pages but the revolutions of a circular saw, the violent rotations of the leaf blower suspended from the ceiling, and even the molecular transformations involved in the setting or melting of gelatine and foam (Figure 3.2).

For Latham, these inversions and subversions of the book were part of something bigger. They were a means to elaborate what he called 'time-based structure' or 'event-structure'. The reality we perceive around

us, he insisted, is not comprised of objects or things but infinitesimal instants in time. Only the recurrence of these instants provides the illusion of solidity and permanence. The 'psychophysical cosmology' of his friends and collaborators Antia Kohsen and Clive Gregory had supplied Latham with the basic principles of this idea in the early 1950s, but it was the momentary pressure on the nozzle of a spray-paint can that provided a more visceral and immediate revelation.⁹ The result – a circular dot on the wall – was a gesture that seemed to encapsulate the paradigm of 'time-based' thinking. It was a statement of pure process and 'a direct record of what had occurred to make it'.¹⁰ In semiotic terms, Latham saw the spray-can dot not as representation or signifier, but as something more akin to an indexical trace. The droplets of paint were an instant of time itself. This minimal mark was what he called a 'least-event'; an elemental unit of time whose repetition 'establishes a "habit" and forms the basis for structures in reality'.¹¹ It was also the start of a quest for an aesthetic language through which to explore and elaborate on this theory, a language in which 'form as art meets formulation as science'.¹² The 'idiom of 54', as he called it, was the big bang from which his subsequent work emanated, and the genesis of his later 'skoob idiom'. Books, for Latham, were a vehicle through which to express the principles of event-structure, but they were one that had a particular symbolic resonance. In its conventional form, the printed book represented everything that he sought to undermine: the solidity and permanence of objects, the weight of tradition and unthinking orthodoxy. They were 'reservoirs of received knowledge', and the accumulated detritus of what he called the 'Mental Furniture Industry'.¹³ Transformed into skoob, however, they illustrated the revolutionary implications of a time-based universe. They were no longer objects in space but events in time.

But is there another way to see these transformations and mutilations? How might we read Latham's works, and indeed his books? Finding angles from which to approach them presents certain problems. In its own terms, Latham's work is not merely art, but metaphysics or science. It constitutes its own distinctive, syncretic cosmology, and represents nothing less than an attempt to shift human consciousness from a reality comprised of matter, towards one made of instants in time. If Latham's work is difficult to locate in a theoretical context, then, it's largely because it insists so strongly on its own. His art practice comes trailing its own conceptual system; an overarching theory whose dense and esoteric vocabulary to a large extent deflects critical dialogue. Like his scientific mentors Kohsen and Gregory, he sought to 'abandon ... the language of

1 objects for the language of events'.¹⁴ But in Latham's case this involved
 2 a literal attempt to reinvent words and their meanings. 'Skoob' was only
 3 one of the neologisms and linguistic inversions he devised. 'Noit' was
 4 a reversal of the suffix 'tion', for instance. Whereas the latter is used
 5 to turn verbs into nouns, Latham symbolically turned it on its head,
 6 transforming nouns or objects into a 'no it'. OHO (sometimes 01-10)
 7 palindromically indicates the occurrence of a 'least event,' oscillating
 8 from 'state 0' to 'state 1' and back again. Latham's theoretical writ-
 9 ings stretch and deform the English language to the same extent as his
 10 work deformed the book, confronting the paradox of expressing his
 11 event-structure in a written medium that imposes its own, competing
 12 grammar of objects and permanence. His shifting, evolving terminology
 13 seems constantly to circle the question of 'idiom', and the problem of
 14 language and its limits.

15 Ultimately, abandoning the language of objects meant abandoning
 16 language altogether, as Latham resorted instead to symbol and equa-
 17 tion. While he lacked formal scientific training, he increasingly tried to
 18 convert his work into a conversation with advanced physics, going as
 19 far as seeking validation of his ideas as a scientific theorem.¹⁵ But these
 20 efforts were only partially successful at best, and this turn to scientific
 21 symbol and number pushed his theories still further towards the brink
 22 of intelligibility. In attempting to escape the confines of language he ran
 23 the risk of closing down communication and critical dialogue altogether,
 24 becoming 'isolated by his insistence on signalling the end of culture
 25 and affirming a cosmology that no one but he can quite understand'.¹⁶
 26 While Latham may be celebrated as 'one of the few genuine radicals of
 27 post war art', therefore, he is someone who tends to elude assimilation
 28 into its narratives.¹⁷ His work was a vehicle for his ideas, but these ideas
 29 position themselves beyond the purview of Art History and criticism.
 30 And, despite the fact that his career intersected with many key innova-
 31 tions and groupings – performance art, auto-destructive art, conceptual
 32 art, Fluxus and Assemblage – he resists such categories. There were big
 33 retrospectives towards the end of his career, but that did not disguise
 34 the fact that in relation to an art establishment that did not know where
 35 he belonged, he appeared as an eccentric, slightly peripheral figure.¹⁸

36 However, this chapter is less interested in Latham's place in the
 37 History of Art, or indeed science, than his place in the history of
 38 the book. Taking an alternative approach to his work, it reads his 'skoob
 39 idiom' through the interwoven developments of print and communi-
 40 cations technology in the twentieth century. Books may have been
 41 his aesthetic medium, but he was also concerned with their status as

1 a 'medium' in another sense. Latham's project can be understood as a
 2 response to – and working through – the implications of technological
 3 change for the book. Or, to put things another way, his work offers its
 4 own distinctive theory of media, but one which finds expression in his
 5 practice as much as his writings: a media theory carried out with circular
 6 saws, pipes, plaster, foam and mutilated books. Moreover, it anticipates
 7 in some striking ways the work of another figure, the recent and influ-
 8 ential German theorist Friedrich Kittler. Reading the two alongside one
 9 another casts new light on Latham's work. In particular, Kittler's notion
 10 of 'time axis manipulation' provides an understanding of Latham's
 11 temporal derangements of the book as something inextricably con-
 12 nected with his film work. To begin with, though, it's the goings on in
 13 the Better Books basement that this parallel reading helps to illuminate.
 14 Latham's acts of 'book plumbing', and his conception of language as
 15 one of several 'pipes' find echoes in Kittler's central thesis of divergent
 16 media channels.

17 For Kittler, writing is a serial storage medium, one that for centu-
 18 ries enjoyed a monopoly. In the era of German Romanticism it faced
 19 no competition. Writing alone was capable of storing linear time, so
 20 visual information and sound had to be squeezed through the 'sym-
 21 bolic bottleneck of letters', and encoded in language.¹⁹ Writing could
 22 thus lay claim to a particular kind of magic, conjuring up the noises
 23 and even images that no technology could yet store: 'words quivered
 24 with sensuality and memory. It was the passion of all reading to hal-
 25 lucinate meaning between lines and letters; the visible and audible
 26 world of Romantic poetics.'²⁰ The act of reading enabled an imagined
 27 dematerialisation of the page surface, so that writing enjoyed a very
 28 special privilege: it could, in effect, make itself disappear. Readers could
 29 forget they were reading and the book 'would forget being a book'.²¹
 30 At the close of the nineteenth century, however, when the advent of
 31 the typewriter closely coincided with the invention of other technolo-
 32 gies able to store sound and moving pictures, media began to develop
 33 specialised functions. A 'differentiation of data streams' occurred
 34 which transforms the book's place in the media ecology.²² Writing now
 35 became technologised, but just as importantly, as merely one media
 36 channel among others its monopoly was now lost. Film technology,
 37 able for the first time in history to record and project moving images,
 38 usurped the magic of writing, and 'feature films [took] over all of the
 39 fantastic or the imaginary, which for a century [had] gone by the name
 40 of Literature'.²³ The printed page, newly demoted, emerged anew as a
 41 two-dimensional, inscribed surface, generating meaning through the

1 pure differentiation of typewritten symbols rather than the transcendent voice of poetry. No longer the ultimate expression of inwardness
 2 or spirit, writing became visible simply as a series of mechanical marks
 3 on a material page.
 4

5 This fall of writing into matter and media is what Latham's work also
 6 registers. *Book Plumbing's* bizarre production line of physical transformations, defacements, dismemberments and augmentations viscerally
 7 enacts the written word's transition from 'Literature' as carrier of transcendent meaning to something 'mechanised and materially specific'.²⁴
 8 It graphically recalibrates the book and its connections. The transformation into 'skoob' denotes the book's changed parameters, and its
 9 emergence as a new kind of object. But it was not only through such
 10 performances and process sculpture that Latham reflected on the book's altered state. In the wall-hung assemblages that he made throughout
 11 his career, books are similarly captured in the process of forming new
 12 connections and assuming new shapes. The reliefs often appear as
 13 the fallout from some unnamed violence, with their printed volumes
 14 as charred debris, static but unstable, caught in positions of falling,
 15 hanging or exploding from the canvas. Recurring elements of mangled
 16 books, wires and other mechanical detritus continually rearrange themselves into varying configurations in an attempt to trace the topography
 17 of an emerging network. *1984* (1987) has a telephone connected to a
 18 book, crossing the wires between written and spoken communication.
 19 Other reliefs characteristically have their coagulated clusters of books
 20 joined to one another by a mysterious network of tubes, wires and
 21 connectors. Latham's terminology for these devices – 'voice pipe' and
 22 'earthing pole' – reinforces the idea that there is a speculative functioning behind this circuitry, so that the works seem to incorporate books
 23 into a set of bizarre and dilapidated looking technological devices.²⁵
 24 Latham's books appear as ruins, but in another sense they are recreated
 25 as something new, radically reimagined as what might be called an
 26 'inter-medial' object. They are transitional forms hooked up to the grid
 27 of a new technological system.
 28

29 It is this collision between books and other media that underlies the
 30 tortured temporality of Latham's work. On one hand, these book reliefs
 31 interrupt and disrupt linear, bookish time simply because they cannot
 32 be read. They are usually either closed or blackened, and their pages
 33 rarely readable as text. To the spectator, their narrative content is out
 34 of reach, and they arrange themselves instead as a 'new structure that
 35 can be grasped simultaneously'.²⁶ But to speculate about how viewers
 36 will process Latham's reliefs is perhaps to miss the point of these works.
 37
 38
 39
 40
 41

1 Understanding the subversions of time that he attempted to effect
 2 involves firstly seeing them differently, or rather, not 'seeing' them
 3 directly at all. The type of gaze they invite is not the intent, lingering
 4 scrutiny of the art lover, trying to make meaning out of them, but the
 5 indifferent, mechanised, blink of the camera shutter. Latham's relief
 6 works present themselves not for the eye, but for the lens, and not
 7 for the viewer but the viewfinder. They are 'inter-medial' not only
 8 because they imagine the book as part of a technological network, but
 9 because these books are criss-crossed by the time of another, compet-
 10 ing media: film. Skoob wrenches the book forwards into the media age,
 11 which does not flow along the narrative arcs of print, but according to
 12 Kittler, 'proceeds in jerks'.²⁷ And it does this because it is governed by
 13 the time structure of a medium, which is itself comprised of a series
 14 of discontinuous 'jerks'. To understand what Latham was doing to the
 15 written word, it's necessary to know what he was doing with the cel-
 16 luloid image, also. He was more prolific as a destroyer of books than he
 17 was as a maker of films but the two are inextricably linked. The handful
 18 of short 'skoob films', which he made in conjunction with his relief
 19 works, are therefore of crucial importance to his whole project.

20 Around 1960, he began experimenting with stop-motion animation.
 21 Fixing some 50 or so books to a board nearly two metres square with
 22 plaster and mesh, he painted their pages a variety of different colours.
 23 They were held open with metal wires but these were adjustable, so
 24 that pages could be turned and the colours changed. Latham rented a
 25 Bolex film camera, but what he did with it wasn't 'filming' in a con-
 26 ventional sense. Instead, while the camera and board remained static,
 27 Latham photographed frame after frame, turning the pages of certain
 28 books in between exposures. The resulting film, *Unedited Material from*
 29 *the Star*, is one in which the books remain recognisable, if illegible, but
 30 start to assume an abstract quality, so that 'words have been replaced
 31 by a silent, visual language of pure colour' (Figure 3.3).²⁸ Their painted
 32 pages appear static, but alternate between colours in sudden, flicker-
 33 ing configurations that seem at times to be random, but develop into
 34 shifting patterns and fugues. Indeed, the overall effect of pulses and
 35 rhythms is one that Latham himself compared to the time signatures of
 36 music. However, the temporality of these oscillating, constantly chang-
 37 ing books is more complex, because of what takes place in between the
 38 turning of the pages, but out of sight. The film's 1,500 frames of stop-
 39 motion animation joined together discrete instants, jumping over and
 40 past the manual process of turning the pages, and creating the illusion
 41 of an impossible continuous sequence. The purpose of the film, Latham

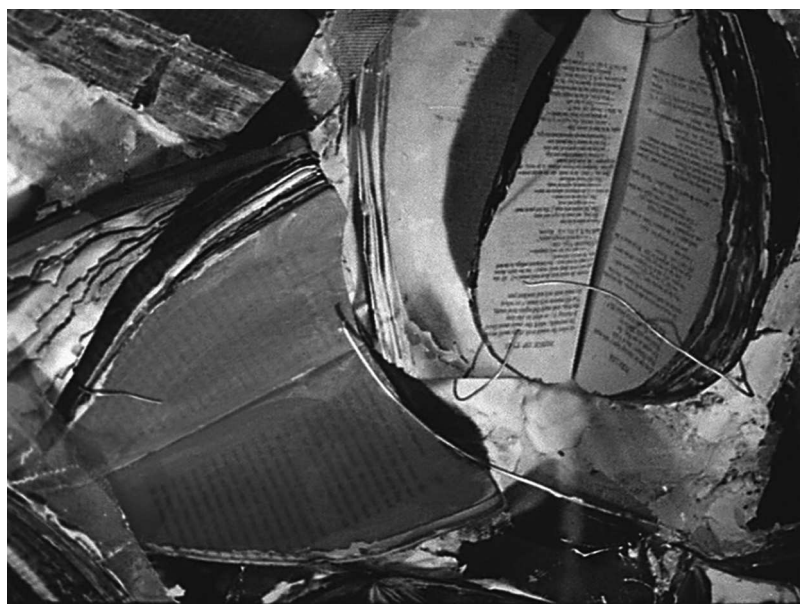


Figure 3.3 John Latham, *Unedited Material from the Star*
(photo: Latham Estate)

wrote, was 'to project on screen an excerpt from what is an invisible part of experience'.²⁹ His technique was a trick with time, therefore, but one common to all film, since, as Kittler writes, '[t]he making of films is in principle nothing but cutting and splicing; the chopping up of continuous motion, or history, before the lens'.³⁰ The discrete, individual instants that make up a reel of film are then projected at a rate so rapid it fools the eye. At twenty-four frames per second, the separate frames appear seamless, and the effect of continuous movement is recreated. According to Kittler, 'time axis manipulation' is fundamental to film, which when it first appeared, brought with it the ability to perform miraculous leaps in time, to conjure uncanny doppelgangers, to slow time down, reverse it or speed it up; illusions that no previous technology had managed, and which the human eye had never seen.³¹ But it achieves these effects precisely because discontinuity and temporal trickery is already at the heart of its technology.

Put another way, film – just like Latham's 'event-structure' – is a reality comprised not of objects, but of moments in time. The link between the two has of course already been established, not least by Latham himself. The effect of successive instants in time, he notes, 'correspond[s]

1 very well with the effect of continuousness in discrete frames pro-
 2 jected by film machinery'.³² But the point here is that the relation-
 3 ship between the two things is not merely one of 'correspondence'
 4 or analogy. Event-structure resembles cinematic time for the simple
 5 reason that it is a description of film itself. 'Film work entered the
 6 scene of skoob in 1959', Latham stated, referring to a studio visit from
 7 a Pathé newsreel team that had first given him the idea of filming his
 8 book reliefs.³³ But arguably, film had been there all along, as something
 9 structurally fundamental to his project and his reformulation of both
 10 time and the book. In conceptualising reality as a discontinuous series
 11 of barely perceptible 'least events' he was providing a *de facto* account of
 12 the working of film and its flickering motion, 'punctured by the insist-
 13 ent event of the frame'.³⁴ The paradigm shift he sought to articulate
 14 took place not at the level of human consciousness or advanced physics
 15 but at the level of technological media, and the time structure he strug-
 16 gled to express in his writings, and which he searched for an appropriate
 17 'idiom' to convey, belongs to the mechanics of projectors and shutter
 18 speeds. Arguably, despite his restless experiments with different materi-
 19 als and media, paper, books, metal, detritus, paint and fire, there was
 20 only one channel through which it could properly be expressed, since,
 21 in abandoning the language of objects for that of events, Latham was
 22 attempting to adopt the vocabulary of film. Latham's skoob films staged
 23 a clash of filmic time and book time, therefore, but it was one which,
 24 by definition, could not be recorded in writing. Or, as Kittler puts it,
 25 'film presents its spectators with their own processes of perception – and
 26 with a precision that is ... accessible ... neither to consciousness nor to
 27 language'.³⁵

28 The 'scene of skoob' was a scene necessarily mediated by the camera
 29 lens, therefore. The chopping up of the book and its transformation
 30 from object in space to moments in time is one that film's time axis
 31 manipulation alone makes possible. In a sense, then, Latham's muti-
 32 lation of books was merely a rehearsal for their filming. His partially
 33 destroyed, unreadable books anticipate and invite their own visual
 34 remediation. Mark Webber notes that the assemblage Latham used in
 35 the filming of *Unedited Material from the Star* was purchased by the Tate
 36 in 1966, whereas the film itself was refused by the gallery: 'It is ironic
 37 that one of the artist's best known works was fabricated, almost like a
 38 prop, in order to make a film that was not acknowledged as a work of art
 39 in itself.'³⁶ The institutional framework of art thus inverted the primacy
 40 of film over canvas in this instance. But although in most other cases
 41 Latham's skoob reliefs were not created for the purpose of stop-motion

1 animation, there is nevertheless a sense in which they are all notional
 2 film 'props'. They await their processing into instants in time by
 3 the film camera, since only this transposition into a rival medium can
 4 truly turn books into 'skoob' (Figure 3.4).³⁷ As if to prove the point,
 5 in 1970, a decade after *Unedited Material From the Star*, Latham turned
 6 his camera on the *Encyclopedia Britannica*. Having previously exploded
 7 and burned encyclopaedias, this time he only subjected its pages to his
 8 relatively benign stop-motion film technique. A tripod was set up at
 9 the Lisson Gallery, with a Bolex camera trained on the open pages of
 10 the encyclopaedia. On this occasion Latham had assistance, and in a
 11 laborious process over several days, the gallery owner Nicholas Logsdail
 12 and musician David Toop photographed four volumes, taking a picture
 13 of each double-page spread before moving the film forward one frame.
 14 Played back at normal speed, this compendious, alphabetised bulk of
 15 facts and figures is compressed into only six minutes. Roughly 50 pages
 16 flash by in a second, flickering blocks of text with only occasional
 17 images recognisable to the eye. The effect is uncanny: as with Latham's
 18 previous stop-motion skoob films, pages turn by themselves, 'as if a
 19 ghost is reading at supernormal speed'.³⁸ The film is simply entitled
 20 *Encyclopedia Britannica*, yet this is clearly no longer the book, but its
 21 codification and incorporation by another technology and another
 22 temporality. Too fleeting to be intelligible, we can derive no knowledge
 23 from it. It enters our brains nonetheless, not via the slow route of read-
 24 ing and cognition but the faster one of optical nerves, and 'the repeti-
 25 tion of almost similar impulses on the retina'.³⁹ It presents us with a
 26 sense of our own limits of reading and seeing.

27 So, after a decade of experimenting with physical damage, Latham
 28 transformed a book into skoob, dismembering, subverting and rein-
 29 venting simply through filming it. But if material destruction was
 30 unnecessary then so, it turned out, were books themselves. *Talk* and
 31 *Speak*, the films projected at *Book Plumbing*, represent a subsequent stage
 32 in Latham's skoob films which, crucially, does not involve books at all.
 33 They were what he termed 'disc-operated time signature films', made
 34 by moving paper circles and other shapes against a fixed surface.⁴⁰ The
 35 damaged, painted books in *Unedited Material* had produced an almost
 36 abstract pattern, but here they decomposed entirely into pure form
 37 and colour. The other noticeable development is that *Speak* introduces
 38 blank white frames in between the patterns and forms, resulting in a
 39 rapid pulsing and flashing, uncomfortable to watch. They create an
 40 overwhelming sense of visual overload, an assault on the senses that
 41 the band Pink Floyd famously used during live performances at the



Figure 3.4 John Latham, *Unedited Material from the Star*
(photo: Latham Estate)

Roundhouse and UFO. They offered to reciprocate, providing Latham with a soundtrack to the films, but the artist turned them down. He was less interested in strobing as a psychedelic effect or as an accompaniment to music than as an exploration of purely visual perception. *Talk* and *Speak* focus attention on the eye working at the limits of its capabilities to process discrete images. They resemble the experiments in 'psychophysics' which Kittler describes as the forerunner of film as a technology, and which employed stroboscopic flickering and its after-images to examine the functioning and thresholds of human optics. 'Since its inception', argues Kittler, 'cinema has been the manipulation of optic nerves and their time'.⁴¹ It's these same limits of human optical capacity that Latham explores, creating films whose sole content is the discontinuities of cinematic time and our ability to keep up with and perceive them: 'In film we have our human frequency range of conscious perception established in frames per second.'⁴² He films filming itself; isolating the media channel in its purest form, from which any vestiges of narrative time has been expunged.⁴³ *Talk* and *Speak* do not communicate in words, and their titles foreground the fact that language is either absent or has ceased to function. *Talk* has a jumble

1 of disconnected radio voices; its speech cut up and spliced in much the
2 same way as a celluloid negative. *Speak* also has the sound of language
3 being cut up: it is wordless, but accompanied by the drone and whine of
4 a circular saw, whose rotations and tone change and modulate slightly
5 as it saws a book in half. This time, books were not chopped into pieces
6 by film itself, but by its soundtrack.

7 Latham's use of his films in live performances and happenings helps
8 to clarify their key significance in his project as a whole. At the Mercury
9 Theatre in 1966, as part of Metzger's *Destruction in Art Symposium*, he
10 staged a performance involving both live actors and a screening of
11 *Unedited Material from the Star*:

12
13 Two bodies, one male and painted partially blue, the other female
14 and light red or orange ... dressed to excess in printed paper, with
15 books and large headpieces on polystyrene bases ... come to stand in
16 front of a film for ten minutes.

17
18 When the film ended, the figures then moved around the stage in elabo-
19 rate and highly unnatural slow motion, before the screening eventually
20 began again. The performance was simply entitled *Film*, raising a ques-
21 tion about where the boundaries of the screen lay.⁴⁴ The actors behaved
22 not as if they were present in the room, but as if their actions were being
23 artificially altered and modified, slowed down according to the speed
24 of the film running through the projector. It's an instance of Kittlerian
25 time axis manipulation, but which takes place in real life rather than
26 on the screen. Or, to be more precise, the distinctions between the two
27 are eroded. The figures on the stage – including the outlandish print
28 and paper objects in which they were covered – were subsumed into the
29 logic of film. Events were subjected to what Mark Seltzer calls 'primary
30 mediation'; a condition in which the real or authentic anticipates and
31 behaves like its filmic double, and the real ceases to be separated in any
32 meaningful way from its technological representations.⁴⁵ This same
33 logic was also at play in Latham's show at the Lisson Gallery in 1970,
34 where a display of sculptural objects on a table included a projector that
35 screened a film, running on a loop, of those same objects *in situ*. Their
36 celluloid representations coincided with, and even anticipated, their
37 physical reality.

38 And so, returning finally to the scenes of elaborate book carnage in
39 the Better Books basement, where *Talk* and *Speak* were projected on
40 a loop, it's evident that these films were not merely additions to the
41 chaos but had a key function. They saturated the environment with

1 their strobing pulse, subordinating all other events and objects to the
2 discontinuities of film. The fraught engagements of film and book in
3 Latham's work thus took another turn; he had subjected books to the
4 'chopping up of motion before the lens', rendering them illegible and
5 gradually decomposing them into abstract shapes. Now, however, it was
6 not the camera lens but the film itself that was the instrument used to
7 dissect the printed book. *Talk* and *Speak* were shown continuously 'as
8 books were being sawn upon a circular saw': the physical cutting up
9 of books was punctuated by the intermittent flashing of the projector
10 so that the action was, in a sense, already chopped into discontinuous
11 instants. Books were dismembered twice over. *Talk* and *Speak* signalled
12 that the confusion of processes and multiple temporalities in the base-
13 ment of Better Books was presided over by one medium in particular.
14 The times of disparate media, materials and machines were forced into
15 collision, but it was celluloid film that set the pace. So if, as Kittler
16 states, all information was once upon a time encoded in writing, and
17 forced through the 'bottleneck' of letters, then Latham's re-plumbing
18 of the book attempts to reverse this process. He sends written language
19 through any number of different channels, reconnecting and rerouting
20 it. But, untangling Latham's conglomeration of people, paper and pipes,
21 machines and media, it's clear that the book is being rerouted in one
22 direction in particular. It is siphoned through the visual data stream of
23 film, where it ceases to be a linear, narrative mode of communication
24 and becomes caught up in a different time structure, proceeding in
25 sudden jumps and cuts which dismember and ultimately dispense with
26 language altogether.

27 The printed book and its ongoing twentieth-century identity crisis
28 was Latham's muse, and the trail of dismembered, mutilated volumes
29 he left behind him was not evidence of destruction, but of a sustained
30 effort to rethink and reinvent. He probed, pushed and stretched its
31 boundaries, ferociously experimenting with new forms it might assume.
32 Battered and charred, his books were no longer quite themselves, but
33 a variety of strange, unreadable, hybrid and inter-medial objects. They
34 were books seen anew, through the alien, mechanical eye of the film
35 camera.

Notes

1. A. J. H. Latham and Lisson Gallery (London, England), *John Latham: Least Event, One Second Drawings, Blind Work, 24 Second Painting; Nov 11th - Dec 6th 1970* (Lisson, 1970), p. 17.

- 1 2. Managed by the poet Bob Cobbing, Better Books was already established as
- 2 a key location in the countercultural art scene of the mid-1960s, and had
- 3 played host to previous events featuring Latham, cohorts and collaborators.
- 4 3. Charles Harrison 'Where Does the Collision Happen', *Studio International*,
- 5 May 1968, 258–61 (p. 261)
- 6 4. Harrison 'Where Does the Collision Happen', p. 261.
- 7 5. Mark Webber, 'Book Plumbing', *John Latham Films 1960–1971*, DVD with
- 8 accompanying essay (London: Lux, 2010), p. 39.
- 9 6. Gustav Metzger and Andrew Wilson, *Gustav Metzger: Damaged Nature, Auto-*
- 10 *Destructive Art* (London: coracle @ workfortheeyetodo, 1996).
- 11 7. The 'skoob tower ceremony' on 24 September was intended as part of the
- 12 *Destruction in Art Symposium*. In the end, it was not an official part of the
- 13 DIAS, however, since its organiser, Gustav Metzger, had already been arrested
- 14 and charged following controversial performance artist Herman Nitsch's per-
- 15 formance at St Bride's Institute, and was reluctant to risk further problems
- 16 with the police.
- 17 8. Harrison 'Where Does the Collision Happen', p. 261.
- 18 9. Gregory and Kohsen later published the *The O-Structure: An Introduction*
- 19 *to Psychophysical Cosmology* (Church Cookham: Institute for the Study of
- 20 Mental Images, 1959). The authors made much of its scientific credibility,
- 21 and of Gregory's role as retired astronomer, but the book's eclectic mixture
- 22 of science, parapsychology and mysticism, as well as its holistic worldview
- 23 anticipates many aspects of countercultural thought which would become
- 24 influential in the next decade, and later morph into 'new age' thinking.
- 25 10. John Latham, Terry Measham and Tate Gallery, *John Latham* (London: Tate
- 26 Gallery Publications, 1976), p. 9.
- 27 11. 'John Latham in Focus': <[http://www.tate.org.uk/whats-on/tate-britain/](http://www.tate.org.uk/whats-on/tate-britain/exhibition/john-latham-focus)
- 28 [exhibition/john-latham-focus](http://www.tate.org.uk/whats-on/tate-britain/exhibition/john-latham-focus)> [accessed 2 October 2013].
- 29 12. John Latham and Ian MacDonald Munro (1989), reproduced in *John Latham:*
- 30 *Art after Physics* (Oxford and Stuttgart: Museum of Modern Art / Edition
- 31 Hansjörg Mayer, 1991), p. 103.
- 32 13. John Walker, *John Latham: The Incidental Person – His Art and Ideas*, illustrated
- 33 edition (London: Middlesex University Press, 1994), p. 36.
- 34 14. Gregory and Kohsen, *The O-Structure*, p. 85.
- 35 15. Latham's correspondence with Stephen Hawking and other prominent
- 36 physicists attempted to elicit an evaluation of his ideas. He seemed con-
- 37 cerned with their status as a valid theorem, and a workable model which
- 38 could be used to speculate and make predictions in the realm of physics. He
- 39 predicted, for instance, that speculations about the existence of gravitons
- 40 would prove groundless. Antony Hudek, Athanasios Velios and Whitechapel
- 41 Art Gallery, *The Portable John Latham* (London: Published by Occasional
- Papers in association with Whitechapel Gallery, 2010), p. 93.
16. Norbert Lynton, in the catalogue of *Arte Inglese Oggi 1960–76*, Milan,
- February 1976, p. 31.
17. David Thorpe, 'What Shows Up', in David Thorpe, Noa Latham and Stephen
- Foster, *John Latham: Time-Base and the Universe* (Southampton: John Hansard
- Gallery, 2006), p. 7.
18. He warrants only one brief mention, for instance, in David Hopkins's survey
- After Modern Art 1945–2000* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000). On

- his death in 2006, the *Guardian* obituary delivered an ambivalent verdict, claiming that his 'lurid career featured more prominently in press reports than it did in 20th century cultural histories': <<http://www.theguardian.com/news/2006/jan/07/guardianobituaries.artsobituaries>> [accessed 24 May 2013].
19. Geoffrey Winthrop-Young and Michael Wutz, 'Translators' Introduction', in Friedrich Kittler, *Gramophone, Film, Typewriter*, illustrated edition (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1999), p. xxiv.
 20. Kittler, *Gramophone, Film, Typewriter*, p. 10.
 21. Friedrich A. Kittler, *Discourse Networks, 1800/1900* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1992), p. 53.
 22. Winthrop-Young and Wutz, 'Translators' Introduction', p. xxv.
 23. Kittler, *Gramophone, Film, Typewriter*, p. 154.
 24. Kittler, *Gramophone, Film, Typewriter*, pp. 10, 226.
 25. These descriptions are found in a letter home from New York, where Latham was preparing to exhibit two large relief works, *Shem* and *Shaun*. The 'earth-ing pole' and 'voice pipe' had become detached, he complained (private letter in the Latham Archive, 1961).
 26. Ina Corizen Meairs, 'Art after Physics', in *John Latham: Art after Physics*, p. 15.
 27. Kittler, *Gramophone, Film, Typewriter*, p. 18.
 28. Walker, *John Latham*, p. 59.
 29. Letter to the BFI from Latham, quoted in Mark Webber, 'Non-Moving Movies: The Static Films of John Latham', *John Latham Films 1960–1971*, DVD with accompanying essay, p. 10.
 30. Kittler, *Gramophone, Film, Typewriter*, p. 117.
 31. Kittler, *Gramophone, Film, Typewriter*, p. 34.
 32. John Latham, 'Time-Base and Determination in Events', reproduced in Walker, *John Latham*, p. 195.
 33. Webber, 'Non-Moving Movies: The Static Films of John Latham', p. 14.
 34. Antony Hudek, 'Here Lies the Body', *Noit* (1 November 2013), p. v.
 35. Kittler, *Gramophone, Film, Typewriter*, p. 161.
 36. Webber, 'Non-Moving Movies: The Static Films of John Latham', p. 13.
 37. The assemblage Latham used in the filming of *Unedited Material from the Star* was purchased by the Tate, where it remains under the title 'Film Star'. However, the film itself was not. The irony of this has been noted by John Walker, who argues that the institutional framework of art, which in the 1960s did not see film as a valid art form, inverted the precedence of film and canvas.
 38. The quotation comes from David Toop's commentary on the film *Encyclopedia Britannica (John Latham Films 1960–1971)*.
 39. Hudek, 'Here Lies the Body', p. v.
 40. Mark Webber, 'Non-Moving Movies: The Static Films of John Latham', p. 14.
 41. Kittler, *Gramophone, Film, Typewriter*, p. 115.
 42. Webber, 'Non-Moving Movies: The Static Films of John Latham', p. 11.
 43. Mark Seltzer, *Serial Killers: Death and Life in America's Wound Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1998), p. 33.
 44. Also known by the title 'Juliet and Romeo'.

4

‘Book Torture’: An Interview
with Ross Birrell*Adam Smyth, Gill Partington and Ross Birrell*

Ross Birrell is an artist, writer and lecturer at the Glasgow School of Arts. He has a long-term interest in book destruction. Birrell engages with burning in *Burning Kafka: The Complete Works of Kafka Burned*, exhibited in individual boxes with a copy of Kafka’s final request to Max Brod to burn his works, letters and manuscripts, and also in a series of ‘pop up books’, featuring books burnt in toasters (Kafka’s *Metamorphosis*; Dante’s *Inferno*; the *Diary of Anne Frank*). Cutting features in ‘Dialogue with Marcel Duchamp’, where Pierre Cabanne’s *Dialogues with Marcel Duchamp* is cut in half with a hacksaw and grated in a domestic grater; and in ‘A Shorter Finnegans Wake’, where a copy of *Finnegans Wake* has the bottom cut off of the book. Birrell’s ongoing ‘Envoy’ series features books thrown into the sea or void, including *The Interpretation of Dreams* thrown into the Gulf of Finland; *Brave New World* thrown into the River Vurjan on the Norwegian–Russian border; and Heidegger’s *Being and Time* thrown into the Grand Canyon.

In 2007 Birrell was awarded an SAC Artist’s Film & Video Award to make a collaborative film with David Harding in Cuba and Miami: *Guantanamo* launched at Glasgow International 2010 and has subsequently been exhibited and screened in the Swiss Institute in Rome, and at the Americas Society, New York. Previous films include *Port Bou: 18 Fragments for Walter Benjamin* (2006) and *Cuernavaca: A Journey in Search of Malcolm Lowry* (2006). Birrell’s exhibitions have reached audiences both nationally and internationally. Birrell is founding editor of *Art & Research: A Journal of Ideas, Contexts and Methods*.

The following conversation took place on 18 June 2013 between Ross Birrell (RB), Adam Smyth (AS) and Gill Partington (GP).

1 AS: This collection is about book destruction. Your work involves the
2 burning, cutting and throwing of books, but are these destructive acts?
3 Is 'destruction' a term that's useful for you? How accurately does it
4 describe what's going on in your work?

5
6 RB: Destruction is a central term, influenced by people like Gustav
7 Metzger and John Latham, but also by much earlier acts of destruction
8 or forms of violence in art, in the nihilistic manifestos and gestures of
9 Futurism, Dada and Surrealism. Destruction is more nakedly evident in
10 the burning and cutting, but the works that involve throwing books,
11 maybe those are in a slightly different register. Back when I started on
12 these works in '96 or '97 I was working on a PhD on destruction in artis-
13 tic practice. The works were closely associated with that, married with
14 my own interest in book collecting. I had a library and an interest in the
15 physical object of the book. As an artist, the books I had were ones that
16 fed into my work in terms of influencing it, but this was a way to bring
17 them in as objects and material in a more playful way.

18
19 AS: So do you see yourself as working in a tradition of destruction in art?

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21 RB: At that time yes, I did see myself as self-consciously invoking that
22 tradition, because I'd spent five years undertaking a practice-oriented
23 thesis on it. But the heroic moment of avant-garde destruction had
24 long since passed – what I did could only really be ironically related to
25 it. It's a ludic and playful response to that tradition. The Kafka boxes
26 were perhaps more of a serious response to that tradition. It was a way
27 of registering Heine's quote that where one burns books one eventually
28 burns people – the atrocity of Nazi book burning, but at the same time
29 registering the fact that there is this extant request by Kafka to burn his
30 complete works unread. So, you might object to the ostensible atrocity
31 of burning a book, and all the metaphors attached to it, but to not do
32 it is to ignore the author's wishes. Kafka read is Kafka betrayed. So the
33 Kafka works exist in that ambiguous space. But at the same time that
34 seriousness of that presentation and the provocation was undermined
35 by being displayed opposite *Metamorphosis* and *Diary of Anne Frank* in
36 toasters: pop-up books. There's a kind of ludic response to book burning
37 and the domestic violence visited on books, the small-scale, back-room
38 torture of books. That's evident in *Finnegan's Wake* with its feet cut off,
39 or Duchamp attacked with a blunt hacksaw and a cheese grater. It's still
40 the sense of destruction but it's more of a playful destruction closer to
41

1 Latham perhaps than to Metzger, who nonetheless remains an impor-
2 tant figure to me.

3
4 GP: But nevertheless in your work there's a kind of avant-garde provoca-
5 tive sensibility, and with the book especially (burning them, throwing
6 them into the sea) there's a taboo you're breaking. Maybe in a similar
7 way to the gesture of throwing the stars and stripes into New York har-
8 bour. Is it important for you to provoke and to break taboos, specifically
9 with books?

10
11 RB: Well, to go back to *Rough Diamond* [a solo exhibition in 1997 at
12 Glasgow's Intermedia Gallery] where I first showed these book works,
13 the city council had given some support towards it, and had approved
14 an outline of the plans, but I don't think they knew in advance that
15 the Anne Frank work was going to be in it. When it was shown in the
16 Red Gallery in Hull, the city council closed the gallery, and it was only
17 reopened after a protest. But there's a playful register to some of these
18 acts – there's a question about whether they are really breaking taboos.
19 You can do anything now, so to what degree are these taboos to be
20 broken? I was looking at and responding to human destructiveness in
21 terms of Auschwitz and the Holocaust and Nuclear Armageddon, so I'd
22 had a long interest in that. Working in the wake of the *Satanic Verses*
23 affair, the burning of books was very much an emotive act, and my
24 work could have moved into that territory: the question of the book's
25 right to exist versus the legitimacy of destroying it. That sense of moral
26 outrage could have opened up space for an artist such as myself, inter-
27 ested in burning or working with books. My response would probably
28 have been to burn Rushdie's book again, to double the perpetration of
29 the violence in order to explore the outrage provoked by that, but that
30 kind of double strategy had already been used by people like Stewart
31 Home, who celebrated the Fatwa on Rushdie. People objected to that,
32 and Home questioned why they were censoring his free speech. The
33 burning of Rushdie's book provoked this space of debate about freedom
34 of speech and freedom of action for artists: who has the right to respond
35 and in what way?

36 But the work I was doing engaged much more closely with a specific
37 territory: I was working in the wake of Metzger as a Jewish artist, an
38 evacuee, working on the theme of destruction, not retreating from it
39 but facing up to it.

40 In terms of the stars and stripes, other artists have done similar works
41 involving walking across the flag, denigrating it, and really, for me, that

1 wasn't so much of a destructive gesture. If you see the photographs of
2 it, there's a kind of ambiguity involved: you bring something back into
3 play, you focus on it in a different way. You throw it away but you're
4 also trying to catch it at the same time. It's the photograph that allows
5 this kind of interplay. They're not destroyed and eradicated in a political
6 sense, these things, they're brought back into play through the photo-
7 graph and the video in the gallery space. It's about repositioning rather
8 than opposition. You're trying to 'revalue' these things in a Nietzschean
9 sense. In that sense it was about working through in a practical and
10 material way a theoretical and political relationship to Nihilism.

11 The question of why books specifically: I suppose it's because I had an
12 addiction to book collecting, to particular editions and so on. There's
13 a mixture of reverence and irreverence in this relationship – seeking it
14 out, spending twenty years finding a particular book. But then what do
15 I do with it, do I collect it and put it on the shelf or do I make an art
16 work out of it? And is the art work serious or is it irreverent? I liberate
17 the titles; they become my titles rather than their titles. Throwing *The*
18 *Interpretation of Dreams* (a Swedish translation) into the Gulf of Finland
19 at dusk for instance; the work is called 'The Interpretation of Dreams'.
20 But it's not an exposition or analysis of Freud's work. You don't have
21 to have read Freud to make the connection. Throwing away dreams
22 at dusk – you're entering the moment of dreams but at the same time
23 you're throwing them away. These are associations that are shared,
24 rather than specific to Freud.

25
26 AS: You also launched Heidegger into the Grand Canyon (Figure 4.1).
27 Can you say more about the importance of place in these works?

28
29 RB: Lots of these gestures are site specific: the *I-Ching* in Korea, *Brave*
30 *New World* in the River Vurjan [on the Norwegian–Russian border]. So
31 the journeys and the places are part of the works. I gifted a copy of
32 Thomas More's *Utopia* to the International Court of Human Rights. I left
33 on the overnight ferry from Hull to Rotterdam, and got on a train to
34 the Hague, then on the way back I threw Erasmus's *In Praise of Folly*
35 off the North Sea ferry at midnight. Erasmus edited and published
36 Thomas More's *Utopia*, and in *Praise of Folly* has a reference to More
37 in the Latin title. Also, when Thomas More was writing *Utopia* he was
38 deployed as an envoy in Flanders in the wool trade, and the title for this
39 series of works as a whole is 'Envoy'.

40 I sent someone to throw the collected works of Marx and Engels into
41 the Neva river in St Petersburg. There was a companion piece to that,

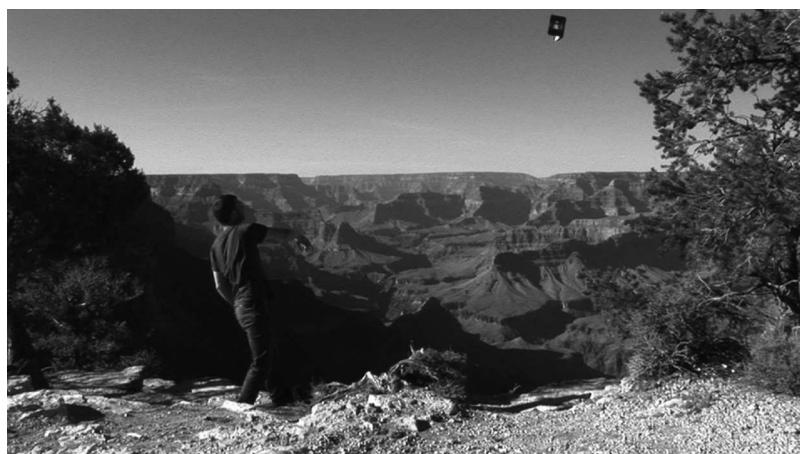


Figure 4.1 Ross Birrell, 'Envoy': Heidegger's *Being and Time* thrown into the Grand Canyon (photo: Artist's own collection)

which was giving *Utopia* to the United Nations in New York then taking a taxi across town to the Staten Island Ferry and throwing the stars and stripes into the Hudson River. So the sites and locations are part of the works. They were large scale operations in terms of their logistics, but small scale in terms of the actual gestures. Many of the books I used come from a tradition of utopian literature, but the book title itself – *The Interpretation of Dreams*, *In Praise of Folly*, *Brave New World*, *Being and Time* – can have a double meaning or more general associations. The title is relocated, becomes more open.

AS: I was looking at the images of the throwing. I'm interested in the relationship between an image which seems iconic and highly charged, and the actual act of throwing a single book into the water. Is there sometimes a moment of bathos when you throw it, when perhaps it doesn't go as high as you want, and it plops into the water? Are you acting out and literalising something which we usually only think of in a symbolic and dematerialised way?

RB: They are performances, but they are articulated through the lens. They are framed gestures, a lot goes into the framing. But you only get one shot at it, and you don't really know until afterwards whether you've got the work. Also, there are different qualities when you look



Figure 4.2 Ross Birrell, 'Burning Kafka: The Complete Works of Kafka Burned' (photo: Artist's own collection)

at it as a still image, as compared to the video. There's more humour in the video. *The Interpretation of Dreams* is only a few seconds long, and there's a kind of bathos, when the book kind of falls flat.

At the Norwegian border, at this important Arctic Cold War frontier, it's a charged failed utopian space of the Soviet Union. But you find if you go just 30 kilometres from the militarised border you're at a border in the middle of river – a stream which you can easily wade across. But you throw the book and it doesn't get across the border, it just falls into the river. There is a mirroring of failure in the gesture on an altogether different scale, more individual and more intimate, but an act of failure nonetheless.

AS: What about burning books? I've tried to burn things like phone books and it's very hard – I had to almost do it page by page – a weird version of reading. Can you talk about the actual act of burning the Kafka?

RB: Yes, failure is part of it. Sometimes it didn't burn and it didn't work, but they weren't done as performances. They all burn in different ways. The most successful ones were the ones where the fire just spreads and creates shapes, physically transforms the object into something beautiful (Figure 4.2). Even when it doesn't work, there's an accidental quality

1 that emerges that I quite enjoy. You're giving the fire authorship. There's
 2 a German translation of *The Trial* which I burned, but because it was a
 3 hardback the fire didn't really take, it just kind of closed on itself,
 4 leaving the title page scarred. It looked better than it would have if I'd
 5 been in charge. You can exercise some choice – I have multiple copies
 6 so I can always do it again. But the failure invoked by *Metamorphosis* in
 7 the toaster, for instance – which catches fire but doesn't burn because
 8 it's compressed – that kind of failure to eradicate something is just as
 9 interesting as total obliteration. Sometimes the throwings are failures
 10 too, but they're funny and interesting in their own way. Sometimes you
 11 don't see the moment of destruction. You don't see the final destruction
 12 of the Heidegger, for instance. There's a three-thousand foot sheer drop,
 13 and it just disappears over the edge. The camera lingers, but you don't
 14 ever see where it goes.

15
 16 GP: But book destruction is quite difficult in some of your works. The
 17 grating and sawing of the Duchamp ... Doesn't it take fifteen minutes
 18 to cut and grate Duchamp?

19
 20 RB: Yes, it took quite a while because the hacksaw was blunt and the
 21 grater was blunt as well (Figures 4.3, 4.4, 4.5). It was partly to do with
 22 left over domestic residue, but also it was to do with the idea of labour.
 23 Duchamp eschewed the idea of labour in the construction of an art
 24 work. He has a kind of aristocratic indifference to human endeavour
 25 and labour and his version of nihilistic indifference is just as impor-
 26 tant to me as the agitated nihilism of other artists associated with
 27 the destructive avant-gardes of Futurism, Dada and Surrealism. This
 28 dialogue with Duchamp is a dialogue with that kind of inheritance of
 29 conceptual art. There's a sense of Duchamp as a hero but also someone
 30 to be overcome. There's a kind of literalising of that. Especially because
 31 of the design of that book: with a horizontal cut the title text could be
 32 maintained in the shot, and also the photograph of Duchamp below it.
 33 You could preserve the references in each of the video pieces, so that the
 34 gesture was self-evidently in dialogue with Duchamp, taking the book
 35 as a ready-made, and the 'assisted ready-made' of the interaction with it.

36
 37 GP: But it seems like it's not just about the labour involved, but also
 38 the resilience of the book as an object. These books aren't just there to
 39 be destroyed, you have to put some effort into it. So I was wondering
 40 if there's something here about the book's hardness, its resistance to
 41 destruction?



Figure 4.3 Ross Birrell, 'Dialogue with Marcel Duchamp'
(photo: Artist's own collection)

RB: Yes, absolutely, and that perhaps goes echoes what Adam was saying about the book's refusal to be burned. With the sawing of Duchamp, it's quite obvious that it's taking longer than anticipated to cut this book. But that makes a better piece, with the materials, the physicality of the object resisting you. There's an analogy with the resistant nature of the content.

AS: There's lots of discussion in the contemporary about the disappearance of the book, anxieties about the digital age when libraries are pulping their holdings. Is your work part of that conversation about the status of the physical book in a digital world?

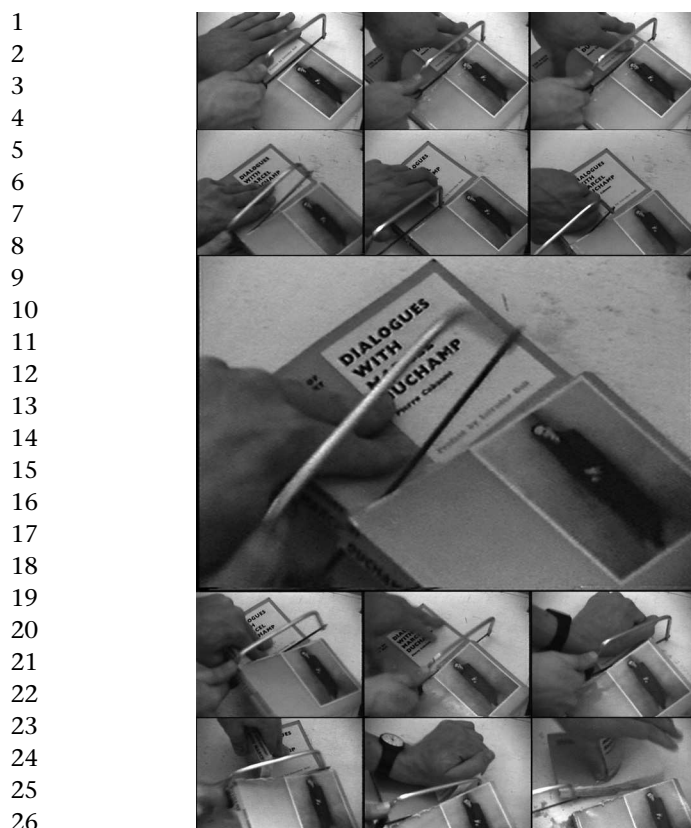


Figure 4.4 Ross Birrell, 'Dialogue with Marcel Duchamp'
(photo: Artist's own collection)

RB: It could be. It's not a guiding intention. I suppose it runs parallel to those discussions. Books do seem to be under attack from other forms of technology, and I do have these series of works that are to do with reading, and they are related to the throwing series. Thoreau's *Walden* is read in a log cabin in Finland, which was neutral territory in the Cold War, and I read the *I-Ching* in Democracy Square in Gwangju, which was the site of a massacre of 2000 students in 1980. I then took a bus to Mokpo – which literally translates as the end of the line – and took a ferry out onto the Yellow Sea and threw it in. The books are being read as well [as being destroyed]. The physical object in a particular symbolic



Figure 4.5 Ross Birrell, 'Dialogue with Marcel Duchamp'
(photo: Artist's own collection)

site is vital – you couldn't do it with a Kindle. The act of reading a physical book in a physical environment, that's a very different kind of transaction to reading something on a screen. The body of works that includes the throwing and cutting, also includes these silent readings in situ. Sometimes these readings involve a book that ends up in the sea.

The destruction and discarding of books could be seen as parallel or analogous to books being in jeopardy in the digital age. But they have to be seen in relation to these readings, which might be seen as a kind of celebration of the physical object.

GP: I want to ask more about this relationship between content and form. The books you use are quite weighty, these are big, canonical, philosophical, literary, political works. But they are also weighty in another way, they have actual physical weight. They have to be heavy enough to be lofted into the air and come down with a splash. In the act of throwing, are you drawing our attention away from these big abstract concepts towards a physical object, or maybe exploring the relationship between the two? Also, regardless of these big ideas, the books all end up as fish food, at least in the 'Envoy' series. What's the significance of them all meeting the same fate?

1 RB: I've described them in the past as acts of apostasy – the refusal or
2 relinquishing of an idea or belief previously held. When you see Marx
3 and Engels going into the Neva river they are going back to the source,
4 being returned to the site of the revolution. In a similar way, the stars
5 and stripes ends up in the Hudson river: so much for the American
6 Dream. It's an individual act versus the collective canon of thought or
7 what we are supposed to inherit. There is a sense in which the canon is
8 cited in order to be resisted or overthrown. At the same time, as Derrida
9 says, all destructive discourses inherit the houses they seek to destroy.
10 You're kind of pulling the house down on your head because you're
11 still inside it. There's an ambiguity because you're still in dialogue with
12 these ideas and invoking them. There's a challenge of negotiating one's
13 own individual position within that, but it's an artwork rather than an
14 essay; it doesn't really say what the conclusion is.

15 But in terms of the physical conclusions to these works, there's a high
16 register of conceptual art, in their use of 'serious' literary titles, but they
17 are really quite prosaic physical events and prosaic physical objects,
18 which can be destroyed, or changed. They do have weight and they
19 do have mass. But the question of whether they meet the same fate is
20 interesting – maybe there's a sense of appealing to or playing with the
21 poetic quality of something being thrown into water. I just did a music
22 and film work, *Sonata*, in Rome which evolved from Keats and I do
23 see a connection now to the 'Envoy' series with Keats's epitaph: 'Here
24 Lies One Whose Name Was Writ in Water' [the engraving on Keats's
25 gravestone in the Protestant Cemetery, Rome]. There's an aesthetic of
26 disappearance, a kind of elegiac tonality or quality of things ending up
27 in water.

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29 AS: That Keats quote is interesting because it's etched into stone, but it's
30 talking about something being inscribed into water.

31
32 RB: Yes, and the final destination of these things is not water, but the
33 gallery wall. Technically they are painted onto the gallery wall as a text,
34 often with also video or photograph. So they resurface, or emerge on a
35 different surface.

36
37 GP: We were talking about the question of the medium of your work.
38 Where would you locate the actual work? Is it the moment when the
39 book is thrown, or is it what ends up on the gallery wall, or in the
40 video?

41

1 RB: Not forgetting the months of labour that goes into the planning and
2 logistics. I think the work is distributed across all those things. It doesn't
3 reside in any one place.

4 There is an image which I've not been able to locate, a Renaissance
5 image of a saint throwing the magical books into the river. It's the same
6 gesture. In the act of apostasy, the act of throwing the heretical book
7 away, it becomes more vivid and more valuable.

8
9 GP: Do you seek out specific editions for the works that you do. You
10 used a Swedish edition of Freud, for example. Are these expensive,
11 attractive volumes?

12
13 RB: There's an element of chance. I was on a residency in Finland and
14 I happened upon a copy of Freud's *Interpretation of Dreams*, which was in
15 Swedish. But I was reminded that Sweden used to occupy Finland, and
16 the island I was on has signs in both Finnish and Swedish. There was a
17 sense of the occupying language, and of the conscious and unconscious
18 relationships between languages. The idea of throwing the book into a
19 'gulf' – the gulf of Finland, was important. There's nothing in the work
20 that tells you that – it's just called 'The Interpretation of Dreams', but
21 it's important that the narrative that I weave has some consistency.
22 I will be looking for specific editions for myself as a collector, but I don't
23 necessarily collect rare first editions. I recently bought a first edition of
24 *The Anatomy of Human Destructiveness* [by Erich Fromm] for two dollars
25 in Boston, for the express purpose of destroying it in an artwork. So if
26 I need to use one of these books in my collection for an artwork, then
27 it's gone, it's sacrificed.

28
29 AS: Do you see your work as part of a contemporary artists working
30 with, altering and repurposing books? Tom Phillips, Dieter Roth and
31 so on?

32
33 RB: Not consciously. I suppose the books could be looked at under those
34 conditions. But I haven't made any specific works of 'book torture'
35 or exhibitions that involve exhibiting the actual book for a number
36 of years. The last time I exhibited actual physical book objects, with
37 the exception of your conference, was about fifteen years ago. Then it
38 started to evolve into video. In the earlier shows the books were there,
39 but now they have disappeared, leaving the text and video piece detail-
40 ing its disappearance.

41

1 GP: On the theme of book torture: you've burned books, grated them,
2 cut them, thrown them into water. Can you say something about these
3 different methods, and about their different connotations?
4

5 RB: Well, on the one hand anything I might say risks closing down con-
6 notations for the viewer. There are obvious qualities and associations to
7 burning which are different to water. Burning has a set of associa-
8 tions which are historical, political, sociological, and also violent and
9 terrifying. There are allusions to the cultures of the book – its role in
10 founding civilisation. It's a dangerous form to employ. It can also be
11 self-aggrandising, which was why I used the toaster to create the pop-
12 up books, to kind of puncture that rhetoric. Water, the ocean, the sea,
13 the river: those are spaces of the sublime, of contemplation. You kind
14 of invoke a sense of renewal or redemption. I do use those things, but
15 'The Destiny of the World' is a sealed package thrown into the Arctic,
16 into the Barents Sea, which on the one hand is a very specific reference
17 to the sinking of the *Kursk* [Russian submarine that sank in the Barents
18 Sea on 12 August 2000]. It was around the time of the anniversary of
19 that, and there was a question about the raising of the *Kursk*. The work
20 was a kind of laying of a wreath for that, for the demise of that techno-
21 logical utopia. There's a kind of high register at work in 'The Destiny of
22 the World', and also the Arctic is the 'destiny of the world' in the sense
23 that the environmental fate of the world rests on the melting of the ice
24 caps or the race for new oil resources.

25 In terms of the cutting up of books, perhaps there are associations
26 with torture, with someone in the cellar cutting up bodies. There's a
27 psychopathic relationship to the book, but it's also intentionally funny.
28 There's a sense of the stupidity and futility of it – fundamentally it's a
29 futile act.
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Part III
Doctoring

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Proof



5

Belligerent Literacy, Bookplates and
Graffiti: Dorothy Helbarton's Book*Anthony Bale***Taking a leaf out of the medieval book**

For those of us who study the books of times long past – in my case, from England, from the fourteenth to sixteenth centuries – we are accustomed to thinking of our sources as the remnant of destruction. The books we study have been used by generations of readers, abused by iconoclasts, reformers and censors, and mistreated by the ebb and flow of esteem and literary fashions. Changing technologies of writing and language caused texts to become out-dated, curious, incomprehensible, rebound or abandoned; the survival rate of medieval English books is estimated to be around 2 to 5 per cent, although a book, if destroyed efficiently, leaves no traces and so this is guesswork.

The most symbolically powerful mode of book destruction in the premodern period, as more recently, seems to have been burning, with book immolation closely related to heterodoxy.¹ In 1410 Wycliffite books were publicly burned at Oxford's Carfax, the crossroads in the centre of a city which shortly afterwards would become the known for the preservation of (orthodox) texts in the form of Duke Humfrey's library (endowed in 1447), the precursor of the Bodleian.² Likewise, following the burning of Lutheran books in Germany, the sixteenth-century 'bibliocaust' of the English Reformation saw wide-scale book burnings: first of Luther's works (burned in London in 1521) and then of 'medieval' Catholic books, destroying a huge number the old religion's books.³ Short of burning, books could be cut up and used in the production of new, more correct, books. For instance, much of what we know about the literacy and book-crafts of the medieval English Jews, expelled in 1290, is from fragments found in the bindings of Christian ecclesiastical manuscripts, as Hebrew manuscripts were used

1 as stiffening.⁴ These examples of book destruction are unusual, and
2 extreme – book destruction as part of social, economic, doctrinal or
3 legal dispossession, underpinned by dogma and censorship.

4 How did one individual destroy another's books? Literature furnishes
5 us with some notable examples. Marie de France's *lai* of Guigemar, writ-
6 ten in England in the twelfth century, includes an arresting description
7 of a mural showing Venus, the goddess of love, burning a copy of Ovid's
8 writings on love, declaring anathema all those who read it.⁵ Chaucer's
9 Wife of Bath both rips and burns her husband's *Book of Wicked Wives*, a
10 text which has caused the Wife much hardship:

11
12 And whan I saugh he wolde nevere fyne
13 To reden on this cursed book al nyght,
14 Al sodeynly thre leves have I plyght
15 Out of his book, right as he radde, and eke
16 I with my fest so took hym on the cheke
17 That in oure fyr he fil bakward adoun (788–93)⁶
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19 Having thus 'purged' her husband of his reading by pushing him into
20 the fire, the Wife later 'made hym brenne the book anon right tho'
21 (816). As critics have noted, Chaucer correlates the destruction of
22 Jankyn's book and the assault on his body, as a marital relationship is
23 remade through the burning of the entire book.⁷

24 Medieval books bearing scorch-marks do not necessarily record
25 violence: in a world of candlelit reading, scorching one's book must
26 have been a common hazard, and the grubby, sooty marks and stains
27 we see in medieval manuscripts probably attest to this. Whilst vellum
28 burns more easily than it tears, to destroy a book by burning was an
29 extreme, unusual and powerfully symbolic event. Medieval and early
30 modern books more frequently bear traces of a quotidian and unex-
31 ceptional damage and, sometimes, of violence. To strike a name out of
32 one's book was proverbial by the late fourteenth century: in Chaucer's
33 'Friar's Tale', a thieving pimp who bribed men who had slept with his
34 'wenches' says 'I shal for thy sake / Do striken hire out of oure lettres
35 blake' (III.1363–4).⁸ However, when inspecting old books we cannot
36 always tell where accidental damage stops and deliberate destruction
37 starts. Damp, mould, dirt, fingerprints, wormholes, stray ink, scorch-
38 marks and watermarks are frequent, showing the accident-prone lives
39 of objects.⁹ In some books, intense caressing and osculation may have
40 marked the page, whilst in others there are gaps and holes where
41 texts or more usually images were removed not for iconoclasm but for

1 special veneration.¹⁰ A fifteenth-century vellum birthing girdle or amulet,
2 designed to be wrapped around a woman's loins during pregnancy and
3 labour, is literally stained from use.¹¹ Elsewhere, rips, erasures, cancelled
4 words, stubs of excised folios and other signs show violence done
5 intentionally, both to damage a book's physical aspect and its textual
6 integrity.¹² Particularly common in English medieval manuscripts is the
7 textual eradication of the feast or image of St Thomas Becket: occasion-
8 ally this takes the form of the whole-scale excision of the offending
9 leaf, but usually a more polite, and ambiguous, crossing-out ('cancel-
10 ling') takes place: this leaves the text and image legible as such, but in a
11 new, damaged state.¹³ A particularly arresting example is furnished by a
12 fifteenth-century manuscript, a pontifical made in the period 1414–43
13 for Henry Chichele, Archbishop of Canterbury.¹⁴ This splendid liturgi-
14 cal manuscript, which contains episcopal liturgies and sacraments, has
15 had the blessing to St Thomas Becket, the patron saint of Canterbury,
16 excised: a stark act of devotional violence showing how the battle over
17 doctrine and sanctity was fought through books. This manuscript had
18 once been the institutional centrepiece of 'medieval' institutional reli-
19 gion but it was precisely the kind of book that Henry VIII and Thomas
20 Cromwell had in their sights in their injunction, of 1538, that Becket's
21 name be 'erased and put out of all the books'.¹⁵ Thus certain kinds of
22 damaged books became more desirable than undamaged ones, as the
23 'damage' eloquently performed the Protestant owners' propriety, reli-
24 gious rectitude and obliteration of a disesteemed past.

25 There is, however, a much more common kind of destructive impulse
26 at work in a huge number of medieval books as they passed through time
27 and changing audiences: the excised, cancelled or superseded owner-
28 ship inscription, or bookplate. The topic of this essay is one medieval
29 book that bears the marks of its history in the form of its bookplates.
30 This book, the earliest owner of which came from the town of Nantwich
31 in Cheshire, is now owned by and held at the Huntington Library in
32 Pasadena, California. Its current class-mark is MS HM 136, which is how
33 the manuscript will be referred to throughout what follows. HM 136 is
34 not a destroyed book; it is a book marked (or 'damaged') in such ways
35 as to efface a previous owner and to convert its value from an artefact
36 for reading to an artefact for owning.

37 The book bears what I term a 'belligerent literacy': concerned with the
38 obliteration of previous ownership but invested in asserting the worth
39 of the book, using reading and writing indelibly to mark the book, aim-
40 ing to be appropriative, distracting, inelegant. In this essay I shall offer
41 an account of the book's inscriptions and move on to consider them

as a kind of graffiti, and I shall return to definitions of both marginalia and graffiti below. The concept of graffiti is helpful in thinking about the status of marginalia in order to interrogate our notions of the book's wholeness, its legitimacy, its uses and its value. What I hope to avoid here is using marginal inscriptions as book historians conventionally have, which is as supporting and secondary evidence – on the contrary, a book's marks, its damage, and its paratexts can be more illuminating, culturally, than the so-called main or body text.

**'Be yt knowen to All men thys ys Dorethes boke':
Dorothy Helbarton and MS HM 136**

HM 136, is a handsome, glossed copy of the Middle English *Brut* chronicle to 1419, with an added Latin prophecy attributed to Robert of Bridlington.¹⁶ The *Brut* chronicle was a staple of medieval reading, possibly the most widely read secular text in late-medieval England, offering a potent narrative of nationalist, moral mythology.¹⁷ There are also a few short texts, added later and, like the prophecy, not part of the book's original design: a list of the kings of England, medical recipes 'for the pestelens', 'for the colik & the stone', for 'a mangey hors', and 'to stanch blood' (f. (ix)r). The manuscript was probably written in the 1460s or '70s. HM 136 is striking due to its many marginal inscriptions, numbering more than 60, pertaining to one Dorothy Helbarton. These were all written in the same period (the hand can be dated to c.1500–50).¹⁸ Almost all of them are in the top right-hand margin on the *recto*, often, but not always, on the first folio of a quire. The size and style of the hand varies considerably and some of the entries were evidently rushed – we can see this because at several points the leaves were turned before the ink had dried, leaving traces on the facing page. Other inscriptions are unfinished, while yet others are orderly, mannered and painstaking: like those marks often referred to as pen-trials, it is as if our scribe was experimenting with different kinds of script whilst also marking the book. It is by no means clear that the inscriptions were written at the same time. The scribe of these bookplates pertaining to Dorothy Helbarton was evidently male, referring to himself at one point as 'he that wyll here re corde thys ys my mystrys buke' (f. 81).¹⁹

The message of the bookplates is very consistent: that 'Thys ys her boke wyche bereth thys name dorethe' (f. 99r; see Figure 5.1). The writing of these bookplates is an act of ownership, not readership. Many of the entries are simple name-tags, for example 'Dore the dore the helbar tun' and 'dore the', 'dore the' (f. 29r), 'mys trys dorethe helbarton mys ...' (an

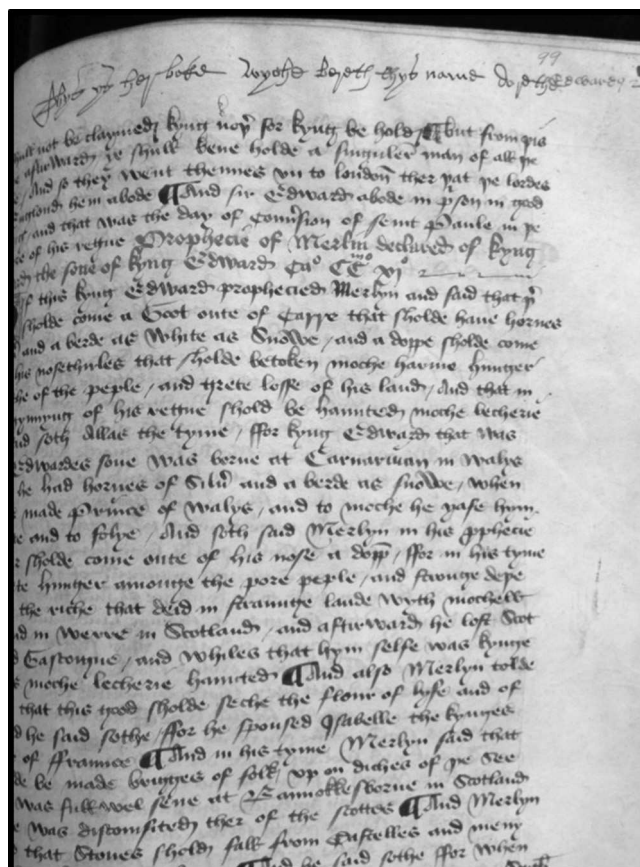


Figure 5.1 Huntington Library MS HM 136, f. 99r. *Brut* with top-margin bookplate, 'Thys ys her boke wyche bereth thys name dorethe'

inscription ending in a flourish, f. 35r), 'mystrys dorethe' (f. 51r, now smudged but still legible), 'dore the dore the' (f. 53r), 'mystrys dorethe' (f. 65r), 'DORETHE HELBARTOVN' (f. 108r), 'dorethe' (f. 53r twice and ff. 136r, 137r, 140r, 141r, 144r), 'thys ys myst ...' (unfinished, f. 132r). Others are elementary and quite normal declarations of book ownership similar to those found in many medieval and early modern books, like 'and thys ys Dore thy Helbartun boke' (f. 54r), 'Thys ys mys tres boke' (f. 57r), 'Thys ys mystrys dorethes boke' (f. 59r), 'Mystrys dorethe thys

1 is your boke' (f. 76r, the first word smudged as if in erasure), 'Dorethe
2 Hel barton thys ys your owne boke', and 'Thys ys dore helbartun boke'
3 (f.(i)r), 'Thys ys mystrys dorethe elbartun boke' (f. (i)v) and 'god saue
4 her that do owe thys boke. Amen' (f.32r, f. 72r without 'amen', f. 90r,
5 and f. (iii)v). Yet further entries are slightly more prolix, but generally
6 conventional in their expression of book ownership: for example, 'Thys
7 ys her boke yndede' (f. 83r), 'Thys ys her boke whyche bereth thys name
8 dorethe' (f. 99r), and the couplets

9
10 Thys ys Dorethe helbartun boke And she wyll a pon ym loke (f. 50r)

11
12 and

13
14 Thys ys my mystrys boke wo woll A pon ym loke (f. 52r)

15
16 and

17
18 by cause thys ys her boke she may the beter on [?, 'in'] ym loke
19 (f. 89r)²⁰

20
21 The almost frenzied frequency of inscription is itself unusual, although
22 the sentiments expressed are themselves conventional, an example of
23 what Sherman has usefully described as 'following rules in unpredict-
24 able ways'.²¹

25 Yet more distinctive is the assertive, and at times aspersive, tone of
26 many of the inscriptions. These include the first sizeable inscription
27 relating to Dorothy Helbarton (f. 9r), which takes the form of an enig-
28 matic short lyric:

29
30 mystrys dore the this is your boke who woull you deny
31 caule me to re corde I wyll saye D[?] H ly

32
33 This rhyme challenges the audience to question the legitimate own-
34 ership of the book, showing how bookplates were used to legitimate
35 readers. Likewise, the next inscription, 'Wyll yow say thys ys not
36 mystrys Dereths boke then yow ly' (f. 13r), is alert not only to Dorothy
37 Helbarton's ownership but also to a dispute over rightful ownership.
38 Further entries – '& Be yt knowen to All men thys ys Dorethes boke'
39 (f. 48r), 'Thys my mystrys boke who outeyth hym for to haue / Who so
40 whoulde Agenstey loke ye ys a vere knaue' (f. 80r), 'Thys ys her houne
41 boke' (f. 91r), 'Why I wyll swere that yt ys her boke' (f. 93r), 'tys her

1 howne boke' (f. 123r), and 'be god yt ys her owne boke' (f. 95r) – like-
 2 wise suggest an assertive urgency on the part of Dorothy Helbarton and
 3 her scribe to assert ownership in the context of rival claimants, appar-
 4 ently male (f. 48r, addressed 'to all men'), invoking the book's efficacy
 5 as an object to be sworn on.²² All these inscriptions perceive the book
 6 to be something at once individually owned yet open to a quasi-public
 7 audience, of 'all men', who may question this ownership. Other, partly
 8 unintelligible, inscriptions describe the scribe's tasks and Dorothy's
 9 ownership in religious terms, 'her self to de fende I be seke the lorde
 10 above' (f. 73r), 'god save her that do hown thys boke' (f. 79r, similar on
 11 ff. 116r, 117r, 130r), and 'god spare her that do howe thys boke' (118r).²³

12 At several points in the book the scribe makes a kind of game of
 13 inscription, posing a question on one folio and answering it on the fol-
 14 lowing ones, as a series, thus:

15
 16 Who is the oner of thys boke mare torne hover the leafe & loke
 17 (f. 100r)²⁴

18 I tel the playne yt ys my mystrys boke Who ys your mystrys
 19 torn over and loke (f. 101r)

20 that ys mystrys Dorethe helbarton (f. 102r)

21 I tell the thys ys her howne boke (f. 103r)

22 Mystres dorethe this is your boke (f. 104r)

23

24 and later:

25

26 Loke on thys boke & tell me woes yt ys torne over & loke (f. 120r)

27 Mystres Dorethe I tell the (f. 121r)

28

29 and later still:

30

31 and I wyl say yt a gayne (f. 126r)

32 Dorethe helbartun yow do howe thys boke (f. 128r)²⁵

33

34 This may be read both as a device by which more leaves of the book
 35 might be marked and as a kind of 'interactive' bookplate, to entertain
 36 the scribe and owner. These multi-part bookplates are quasi-dramatic,
 37 certainly dialogic, and they vary in their imagined audience: some are
 38 addressed to God, others to Dorothy Helbarton, some to her detrac-
 39 tors, some impersonally to the reader, and in some of them the scribe
 40 addresses himself. The bookplates offer a parallel reading experience, in
 41 effect setting up a competing, marginal narrative.

1 The majority of the inscriptions in HM 136 suggest little interest in
2 the body text and instead demand a visual focus on the margins and an
3 imaginative focus on the material possession of the book. The inscriptions
4 pertaining to Dorothy Helbarton do not extol the merits of the
5 book – or the text – but focus instead on the owner and the materiality
6 of the book-as-object.

7 The more extended inscriptions in HM 136 suggest a considerable
8 degree of self-conscious composition, at once ludic and considered, and
9 were evidently composed with some thought. The scribe included the
10 well-known epigram ‘yn my beggenneng god be my sped In grace & of
11 vartu to pro sede’ (f. 112r).²⁶ His rhetorical sense of the inscriptions is
12 seen in the doggerel verse

13
14 D and now thys letel d
15 full well I do cumende
16 I pray god that she
17 Her selfe may now defende (f. 66r).

18
19 This bookplate suggests that ‘D’ – i.e. Dorothy – received the book from
20 ‘D’, although elsewhere the scribe suggests that Dorothy’s mother gave
21 her the book (‘D’ could, therefore, be Dorothy’s mother). Some of the
22 inscriptions are hurried, the ink smudging onto the facing page (e.g. on
23 f. 53v from f. 54r, on f. 62v from f. 63r), the leaf having been turned
24 before the ink might dry; there is also evidence of frequent misspell-
25 ing and transposed letters (as can be seen in many of the bookplates
26 quoted above) and multiple erasures, deletions and pen-trials (e.g. the
27 scribe was trying out letter-forms in the margin of f. 59r, where he wrote
28 ‘D d d d’). The mottoes quoted, as well as the extended programme of
29 ownership inscriptions in HM 136, suggest a debt to the culture of the
30 commonplace book, with its aphoristic repetition, formulaic discourse,
31 accretion over a period of time and emphasis on individuated owner-
32 ship. As in a commonplace book, the act of inscription trumps ‘neat-
33 ness’ or visual beauty.

34 We know that Dorothy Helbarton’s mother was surnamed Barnard,
35 from the legends ‘mystrys barnarde gaue her thys boke’ (f. 85r) and
36 ‘Who gave her thys bok mare her mother’ (f. 106r).²⁷ Dorothy Helbarton
37 might have been a child when some of the inscriptions were made, as
38 suggested by the epithet ‘letel’ (f. 66).²⁸ However, she could possibly
39 read (as some of the inscriptions are addressed to her), even if she could
40 not write. Her employment of a scribe suggests a considerable degree
41 of wealth and a familiarity with literary culture. Helbarton or her scribe

may have read the *Brut* chronicle contained in the book, as there are a number of bookplates concerning Helbarton that seem to engage with the body-text. These all appear within a few folios of each other and each appears alongside an account of royal pageantry in the London vicinity during Richard II's reign. The name 'Dorethe' appears in the margin alongside the account of the Londoners' welcome of Richard II after his being in York during raids by the Scots (f. 136r); 'Dorethe' appears (f. 137r) alongside an account of jousts at London's Smithfield held in 1388; 'Dorethe' appears again by an account of the procession of the people with the newly-married Richard II and Isabelle of France on their way out of London through Southwark and Kennington (f. 140r); on the next folio, 'Dorethe' appears next to the words 'all these worþy lordes' (f. 141r), describing the aristocratic attendees of Richard II's Great Parliament; finally, 'Dorethe' appears a couple of pages later, alongside the account of the post-funeral procession of Richard II's body from St Paul's to Westminster to Langley (f. 144r). Dorothy Helbarton has not been found in the historical record, and this marginalia might equally plausibly suggest that she lived in or near London, as all these historical moments involve the London area, that she had a love of pageantry, or perhaps that she was related to a Garter Knight. But caution is needed: as Sherman says, 'by no means all of the interesting notes written by readers in the margins and other blank spaces of books comment directly or indirectly on the text they are found in' but 'were entered in books simply because they offered a convenient space for writing and archiving'.²⁹ The name may appear alongside the text by chance, and each of these inscriptions appears in the same position on the folio (in the middle of the recto margin), possibly signifying nothing more or less than Dorothy Helbarton's assertion of ownership.

The destruction of a library

As a category of evidence, bookplates can then show us much more than simply the historical agents who shaped and owned a book. They reveal not only physical, genealogical and geographical traffic, but also disputed notions of authority and reading. Bookplates can allow voices to emerge and suggest the ways in which voices might be silenced. Rather than seeing late medieval and early modern reading as a fundamentally cooperative and humanistic enterprise, bookplates allow us to glimpse the acquisitive and competitive elements of textual culture, a belligerent literacy. This is not to infer anything negative in such a way of using books, but such a belligerent literacy might use inscription to

1 erase ownership or evidence of reading, to insult other readers or own-
 2 ers, to damage or mark a book in some way that is oppositional: in other
 3 words, a literacy which is acquisitive, assertive, aggressive. This is not
 4 the same as the compilation, reordering, glossing, later decoration, or
 5 pen-trials seen in many early books: rather, a belligerent literacy uses
 6 writing and book-crafts to *convert* the book from one state to another.
 7 This writing stays with the book, and becomes part of the book, like a
 8 scar showing battles fought.

9 In their ground-breaking study of Gabriel Harvey's marginalia in his
 10 sixteenth-century copy of Livy, Lisa Jardine and Anthony Grafton built
 11 up a detailed picture of the specific 'occasions for reading' which stimu-
 12 lated marginalia and commentary which was, in turn, social, political,
 13 worldly: Renaissance reading was 'purposeful reading', in which texts
 14 were consulted, recalled and glossed in order to engage with current
 15 affairs. Jardine and Grafton provide a powerful model for a reading
 16 process charged with motives, 'immediate needs' and the urgency of
 17 action; indeed, it has become a critical axiom that 'marginalia record
 18 the responses of actual readers'.³⁰ Yet we cannot surmise that the
 19 *Brut* chronicle in the body-text was 'purposeful reading' for Dorothy
 20 Helbarton or her scribe: there is little evidence that Helbarton read
 21 the text or that she or her scribe was particularly interested in it. After
 22 Helbarton's scribe had marked the book, nobody seems to have sought
 23 to remove her marks. However, a later owner, Francis Dorrington, did
 24 mark the book with his own assertive bookplate, written on a rear fly-
 25 leaf in a large and formal, if shaky, hand: 'Franciscus Dorrington huius
 26 liber possessor legitimus': Francis Dorrington is the *legitimate* owner of
 27 this book.³¹

28 Yet such bookplates might be seen as an extension of Jardine and
 29 Grafton's statement that 'Renaissance readers (and annotators) persis-
 30 tently envisage action as the outcome of reading, "reading as trigger for
 31 action"'.³² This statement is true for Dorothy Helbarton as for Gabriel
 32 Harvey, but in a rather different way: bookplates articulate an assertion
 33 of ownership of the book, rather than engagement with the text. The
 34 bookplates of HM 136 suggest that it was owned, rather than studied,
 35 for action: Helbarton's scribe sought to mark or 'damage' the book
 36 whilst retaining its integrity, in order to destroy a rival claim to owner-
 37 ship and possibly to obliterate another person's library.

38 The inscriptions of HM 136 suggest that many of them were written
 39 in the context of a dispute over the ownership of the book. We know
 40 some things about the owners of the book previous to Helbarton. The
 41 earliest known owner was almost certainly John Leche (*fl.* 1507–25), a

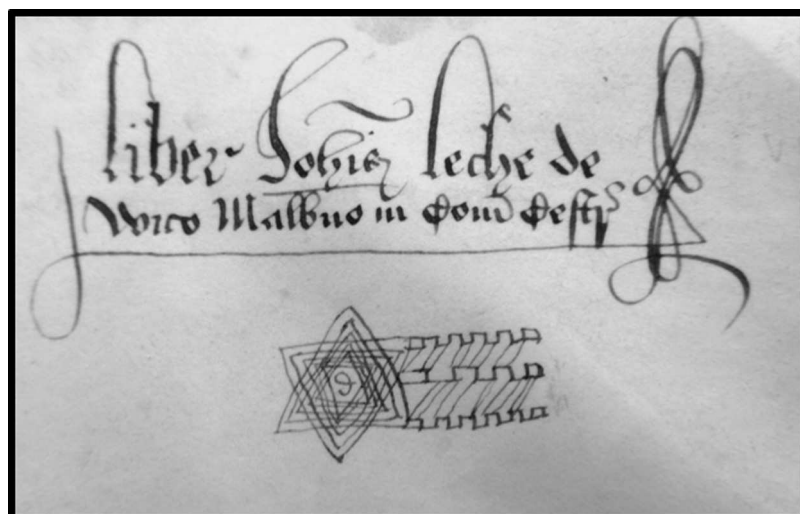


Figure 5.2 Huntington Library MS HM 136, f. (vii)r. Abbreviated bookplate, 'Liber Johis Leche de Wico Malbno in Com. Cestr.', with later rebus below

member of a wealthy gentry family of Nantwich (Cheshire). Leche, who was probably a lawyer, had a sophisticated and varied library: in addition to the HM 136 *Brut* chronicle, he had six further manuscript volumes of Latin and English material and a printed copy of Jean Froissart's *Chroniques*.³³ This represents a reasonably large and varied collection of books for a provincial gentleman at the time. Leche had a formal, ritualised way of marking his name in his books: his signature, *Liber Johannis Leche*, marked in each book, in distinctive lettering, on the front and/or rear fly-leaves (Figure 5.2).

Leche's library was evidently scattered; the circumstances behind the break-up of this library are unclear, although Leche's books were dispersed by the mid-sixteenth century.

Very little recent scholarship on marginalia has considered bookplates or mined ownership inscriptions to think about different modes of reading and writing and competing definitions of book ownership.³⁴ Instead, book historians have focused on 'active' readers of texts, rather than owners of books. Even one of the most eloquent recent studies of early modern book annotation differentiates between 'more or less substantial *writing*' and 'signatures, underlining, and nonverbal symbols', as if bookplates are of a different order from, and of less interest than,

1 'notes'.³⁵ Most marginalia in late medieval and early modern books
 2 engages with the text, and, as Stephen Orgel has argued, was seen as
 3 an intrinsic part of the book, not something which would damage the
 4 book's value or appeal.³⁶ Orgel asks, 'At what point did marginalia,
 5 the legible incorporation of the work of reading into the text of the
 6 book, become a way of defacing it rather than increasing its value?'³⁷
 7 Inscriptions like those of Dorothy Helbarton suggest that we may need
 8 to decouple the history of books from the history of reading to a greater
 9 extent than has been thought, as the material artefact of the book bears
 10 markers of ownership and value, not just text. Indeed, once one starts
 11 to look for it, one finds that very many manuscript books circulating in
 12 the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries reveal an anxious, if conventional,
 13 awareness of disputed ownership.

14 For instance, books with bookplates frequently assert legitimate owner-
 15 ship at the same time as they invoke illegitimate readers. A late-medieval
 16 book of hours bears the inscription 'Yf any body fynd Thys boke I pray
 17 them bryng yt to Mistres Trygg for yt by hers':³⁸ a book which was
 18 much used, and evidently shared, nonetheless had a named owner,
 19 with a bookplate, attached to it. In a manuscript, like HM 136 also read
 20 in medieval Nantwich, four sixteenth-century members of the Hassall
 21 family – William, John, Richard and Margerite – wrote their names a
 22 numbers of times, William Hassall doing so five times.³⁹ In another
 23 fifteenth-century Chaucer manuscript, some thirteen names have been
 24 inscribed;⁴⁰ one of them, a 'Roland Rudgley', went further than other
 25 readers and owners by marking his name at least six times, including
 26 the assertion that he is the 'right honer' of the book (f. 152r).

27 The famous Ellesmere Chaucer manuscript bears the abusive graffito
 28 'Margery seynt John ys a shrew' alongside others' mottoes, some erased,
 29 and signatures.⁴¹ Similarly, another *Canterbury Tales* manuscript, once
 30 owned by an unfortunate hermit in Greenwich, contains marginalia
 31 suggesting disputed ownership: about 1500, the following was inscribed
 32 in the book: 'Lucas parker owes this boke wytne Robert Parker', along
 33 with other names of the Parker family. On the same page as this inscrip-
 34 tion is the following abuse: 'Homfraye deryke is a knaue', 'Homfraye
 35 dethik is a knaue ... soo', and 'Houmfraye dethike dux omnium
 36 malorum'.⁴²

37 There is widespread evidence, resonant of HM 136, of curses on
 38 potential book-thieves, such as a note by 'John Barcllay' who records
 39 'This booke ise mine he that steles this booke frome me he shall be
 40 hanged on a trie', whilst a manuscript now in Durham records 'Thys
 41 ys John Hancock ys boke ho so ever saye naye/ The devyll of hell bere

1 Thomas carter awaye'.⁴³ Consider too the anathema against stealing
 2 books, written below several ownership inscriptions, in a late fifteenth-
 3 century miscellany: 'Thys Boke hys whon & crystes cors hys a nodor
 4 he that steles they boke thake they thodor'.⁴⁴ That this denunciation
 5 appears in a book which has at least a dozen readers' names inscribed
 6 in it suggests the busy and fraught movement of books through its
 7 owners' hands, with a concomitant anxiety about legitimate ownership.
 8 Conversely, ownership inscriptions are frequently witnessed, affirming
 9 the public, ritualised, legalistic and binding ownership of books; for
 10 example, we find the motto 'John baker owe this boke wytnes John
 11 fuller Edmund baker damys', written upside-down, dating from about
 12 1550, in a fifteenth-century devotional miscellany).⁴⁵ This manuscript
 13 is an intriguing parallel to HM 136, as various bookplates and other
 14 marks were made throughout. Baker wrote his name and other notes,
 15 often upside-down, and 'Jhon Wood' has been firmly struck-through. In
 16 about 1500 a hard-up youth wrote a note to their mother and father in
 17 the book, requesting 'a grote for to paye my quarterege & I pray youe to
 18 send me a payer of shoues & soues & I praye yow to send me a cape &
 19 a gerdelle & I paray yow to send me a purese' (f. 34r). Whilst this letter
 20 appears to be intimate and pragmatic, it is followed in the same hand
 21 by an aphoristic motto, 'He that In youthe no vertue wyll Use In age
 22 all honour wyll haym refues so be it'. The same leaf appears to have a
 23 crossed-out ownership signature at the top. Other leaves (ff. 37, 54, 81)
 24 have been trimmed, as if to excise bookplates.

25 Ownership notes can be seen to legitimize their owners, signalling the
 26 considerable financial and symbolic worth of books – Sir John Brograve
 27 (d. 1613) went so far as to have at least ten people witness his ownership
 28 inscription in his copy of *The Canterbury Tales*.⁴⁶ A John Terry, writing
 29 in the early sixteenth century, wrote a witty macaronic bookplate in his
 30 fifteenth-century copy of Ovid, signalling both property and propriety:

31
 32 Iste liber pertinent and bere it well in minde
 33 De me Johanni Terry so curtise and soe kinde.⁴⁷
 34

35 Books are mentioned relatively frequently in medieval wills, mediating
 36 personal relationships, literary culture and the financial facts of literacy
 37 in a society configured around inheritance.⁴⁸ When assertion or erasure
 38 through bookplates was not enough, an ownership inscription could be
 39 physically excised, either by rubbing or cutting it out, and this is some-
 40 thing that can be seen in countless books that were otherwise looked
 41 after, valued and maintained. In a fifteenth-century Irish manuscript of

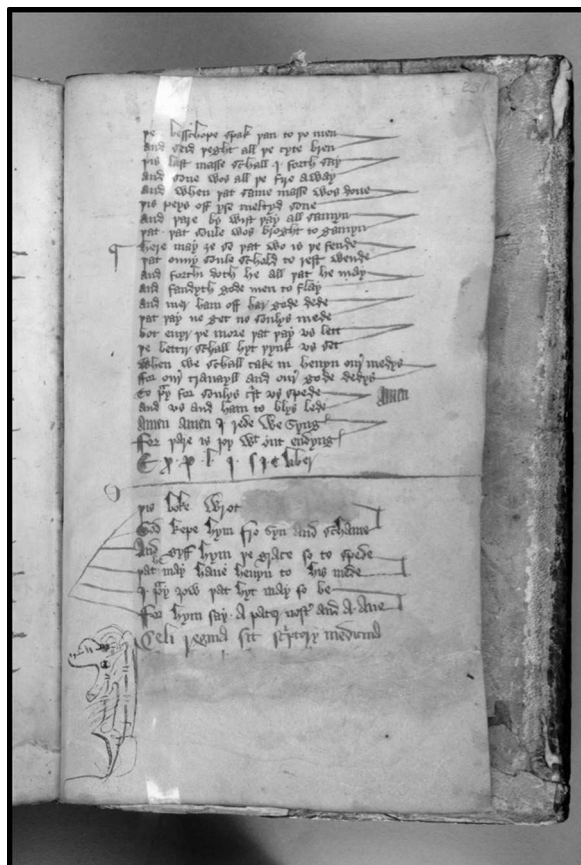


Figure 5.3 Huntington Library MS HM 129, f. 231r. Northern Homily Cycle with effaced scribal and ownership inscription

The Northern Homily Cycle, the closing colophon has been mutilated, in order to remove a name (see Figure 5.3):

pis boke wrot <.....>
 God kepe hym fro syn and schame
 And gyff hym þe grace so to spede
 pat ^{he} may haue heuyn to his mede
 I pray 3ow pat hyt may so be
 For hym say a pater noster and A Aue

1 *Celi regina sit scriptory medicina*
 2 <.....>
 3 <.....>⁴⁹

4
 5 Here, the pre-Reformation prayers have endured, but the scribe's name
 6 has been excised. Book destruction is thus the logical extension of book
 7 ownership, as book-owners marked their books not for literary or moral
 8 worth but for the sake of ownership.⁵⁰ These are just a few examples of
 9 a common occurrence, showing an anxious or antagonistic animus to
 10 book ownership. Indeed, they lead one to wonder whether ownership
 11 bookplates exist only to compete with or deny somebody else's claim
 12 to ownership.

13 14 **Graffiti, belligerent literacy and the problem of marginalia**

15
 16 In an unfinished fifteenth-century manuscript of *The Canterbury Tales*,
 17 somebody, probably in the 1590s, wrote various bookplates, plant names,
 18 a legal instrument, and mottoes and quotations in Latin. He also wrote
 19 the following couplet:

20
 21 Thy masters booke dothe scorne thy name
 22 To scribe therin then cease for shame.⁵¹

23
 24 Because the book contained the name of the master/owner, other writ-
 25 ers could not 'scribe' theirs in it. In this bookplate, an interdiction on
 26 other writers/annotators accompanies a sense of legitimate ownership.
 27 However, the couplet had no effect; in a different hand, somebody else
 28 wrote:

29
 30 My masters booke will geve me lefe
 31 too scribble ther in y ask no lefe

32
 33 Defiant, witty and permanent, this rejoinder delights in its own lack of
 34 authority, and, through mimicry, scorns the authority of the 'master' to
 35 lay claim to the pristine page. Thus the difference between writing and
 36 'scribbling' is akin to the difference between a flower and a weed: one
 37 is authorised, the other not.

38 Such inscriptions, like those of HM 136, might better be thought of
 39 not as marginalia but as a kind of graffiti: portable, contingent (or mark-
 40 ing a specific moment and serving a specific occasion), resolutely
 41 material and transgressively appropriative of textual and visual space.⁵²

1 Moreover, like graffiti, these inscriptions balance precariously between
2 damage and enhancement, use and abuse, of the surface on which they
3 are written.

4 In his work on medieval marginalia, Michael Camille drew a parallel
5 between contemporary graffiti and 'the erasure of previous words, signs,
6 and images working like later glosses and additions of new owners'
7 arms and heraldry or even as in the erasures one finds in the margins
8 of manuscripts'.⁵³ Camille's suggestion that medieval marginal inscrip-
9 tions are akin to contemporary graffiti is a seductive one, in as much as
10 medieval manuscripts were often, like a graffitied wall, in an ongoing
11 process of revision and appropriation. However, Juliet Fleming has con-
12 vincingly argued that late-medieval and early modern graffiti – in the
13 sense of writing or drawing scratched on walls or other surfaces – was
14 not inherently a trespass.⁵⁴ Rather than being necessarily dissident or
15 radical, graffiti represents an awareness of writing and etching as a kind
16 of marking or tagging that claims possession and leaves a personal trail:
17 like bookplates, graffiti personalises the impersonal, or repersonalises an
18 object, and presents a kind of 'public self' through a textuality which
19 is often fleeting or accretive. Scratched inscriptions on prison walls,
20 country-house mantelpieces or church windows share with textual mot-
21 toes and bookplates an engagement with a 'collective, aphoristic and
22 inscriptive' mode of authorship, rather than one that was 'individualist,
23 lyric, and voice-centred'.⁵⁵ William Sherman and Jason Scott-Warren,
24 both taking their cue from Fleming's work, have productively used the
25 category of graffiti in thinking about marginalia in early modern books.
26 Scott-Warren notes the 'presentist impulse of graffiti' – the assertion
27 that 'I was here' – in signatures and bookplates.⁵⁶ As in HM 136, the
28 'here' is the public or social page of the book, the page becoming popu-
29 lated by its owners and indeed one of the most common bookplates is
30 that of the owner's name and parish or home.⁵⁷

31 But how can graffiti exist in a manuscript book, essentially a 'writing
32 apparatus' or vehicle for writing, when graffiti is, in its modern sense,
33 held to be writing on an object that should not be written on?⁵⁸ And
34 can we say the bookplates of HM 136 are like graffiti, in either its early
35 modern or contemporary senses? First, and very much like graffiti, the
36 marginal inscriptions aim to make the object speak, and speak differ-
37 ently from how it was originally considered; HM 136 is converted from
38 a chronicle of yesteryear to a chronicle of the 'now' of which the mar-
39 ginalia speak. Secondly, like graffiti, the inscriptions of HM 136 fill, or
40 repurpose, space, and that is their *raison d'être* – they aim to mark, soil
41 and tag the book indelibly. The typical place to write a bookplate or

ownership inscription in a medieval book was either on the fly-leaves or on the first or last folio; whilst it is not so unusual for owners to write their name on the text pages, the formal mark of possession usually appears at the beginning or the end of the book. In HM 136, as in modern graffiti, space becomes invaded and owned through an 'excess' of the written word, in contradistinction to the other 'legitimate' written words on the page. In this way, the inscriptions of the book foreshadow the sense of graffiti as a trespass especially as, like graffiti, these inscriptions tend to the fractious and oppositional. Furthermore, HM 136 places side by side very different and competing senses of writing and textuality: edifying literacy versus pragmatic literacy, a literacy which transcends time and place versus a literacy which is acutely embedded in the concerns of one particular woman.

For H. J. Jackson, one of the defining features of marginal 'notes' as opposed to marks is that they are directly responsive to the text.⁵⁹ In most medieval and early modern vernacular books, marginalia assists the reader: hard words and allusions are explained, chapter divisions are noted, manicules or other marks guide the reader's attention to noteworthy passages, and illustrations frame, comment on and elucidate the text for better mnemonic retention.⁶⁰ Other kinds of pragmatic literacy have not been emphasised, or fully explored, in recent work in book history; scholars have tended to see self-improvement or self-fashioning as the effects of reading, rather than, say, disinheriting a rival, displaying one's wealth, noting one's property, or building a valuable antiquarian collection of medieval books.⁶¹ It is crucial to reiterate that the inscriptions relating to Dorothy Helbarton hardly refer to the body-text: they do not comprise a gloss, or even 'readers' marks', but are more like a separate 'text'. In this sense, they bear little relation to the 'marking' of words that was the starting point of early modern practices of book use.⁶² Late medieval and early modern marginalia are usually seen as emphasising the interdependence and mutual illumination of body-text and margins; sometimes this relationship is complementary, at other times ironic. In a much-cited essay, Michael Camille has argued that the margins of medieval books were 'a site for the confrontation and even the intercourse of the flesh and the spirit', in which defilement, licentiousness and illicit interpretations were gathered.⁶³ Camille notes how scholastic ways of reading and glossing encouraged the remaking of text through marginal annotation and marks of disagreement.

Instead, the bookplates of HM 136 suggest a pressing desire to claim possession of the book as artefact rather than to engage with the text. The bookplates propound a relationship with the book quite separate

1 from a love of the text, a bibliophilia focused on material possession or
2 ownership rather than reading. For Dorothy Helbarton, to be able to
3 mark the book (or have the book marked for her) was the overriding
4 concern and any edification arising from the body-text is subordinate
5 (or even irrelevant). We might see in Dorothy Helbarton's inscriptions
6 an intensely pragmatic and anti-literary engagement with the book,
7 upholding the value of books (not literature). Scott-Warren remarks too
8 on the 'sociable and possessive spirit' of the bookplate, often suggestive
9 of a social ritual akin to an assertion of loyalty or kinship, a communal
10 moment of shared textuality similar to the writing and witnessing of a
11 will. Dorothy Helbarton seems to have had little *literary* awareness, but
12 a great deal of awareness of material textuality, and her access to a scribe
13 asserted her presence as a female owner rather than as a female reader.
14 In fifteenth- and sixteenth-century England, where wills and other tes-
15 tamentary notes were often written in books, writing in a book's mar-
16 gins often represented a lasting record of subjective, if disputed, proof.

17 Bookplates like those relating to Dorothy Helbarton are a useful way
18 into thinking about the very basis of the bio-bibliographer's enterprise,
19 and H. L. Jackson has suggested two new terms for considering books
20 with marginalia: the 'bibliofile', in which the evidence of real lives are
21 bound up in books, or the 'bepu', a 'book enhanced for personal use'.⁶⁴
22 Jackson's point here, as I understand it, is that marginalia in books
23 (often held to be a kind of damage) actually transforms the book into
24 something preciously personal and individual. Through Helbarton's
25 bookplates, we can discern an otherwise unknown early modern
26 reader's engagement with a medieval book, and the belligerent, and
27 sometimes destructive, nature of book ownership. In a culture in which
28 women generally did not *write* texts, even as they frequently read and
29 owned them, bookplates deserve to be taken seriously both to further
30 our understanding of women's engagement with literary culture and
31 also to understand how this engagement has been obliterated by other
32 ownership and by modern scholarship.⁶⁵ As with modern graffiti, in
33 Dorothy Helbarton's inscriptions there is a frisson of authentic, if medi-
34 ated, self-assertion, and we are able to glimpse one owner's urgent desire
35 to claim her book.

Notes

- 39 1. See Haig A. Bosmajian, *Burning Books* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2006), for a
40 general survey of the destruction of books by fire.

2. On the burning of Lollard books more generally see John Bowers, 'Piers Plowman and the Police: Notes Toward a History of the Wycliffite Langland', *Yearbook of Langland Studies* 6 (1992): 1–50. The burning of Lollard books accompanied the burning of the Lollards themselves.
3. The term 'bibliocaust' is from Brian Cummings, 'Iconoclasm and Bibliophobia in the English Reformations 1521–1558', in Jeremy Dimmick, James Simpson and Nicolette Zeeman (eds), *Images, Idolatry and Iconoclasm in Late Medieval England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), pp. 185–206; Cummings describes book burning as 'a major European sport' from about 1518 (p. 200). A programme of book-burning can be seen to have been instituted by Cardinal Wolsey from about 1526.
4. See Judith Olszowy-Schlanger, *Les manuscrits hébreux dans l'Angleterre médiévale: étude historique et paléographique* (Paris: Peeters, 2003).
5. See *The Lays of Marie de France*, ed. Edward J. Gallagher (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2010), p. 7.
6. References to Chaucer are taken from *The Riverside Chaucer*, gen. ed. Larry D. Benson, 2nd edn. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987).
7. For stimulating readings of this passage see Alice Hamilton, 'Helowys and the Burning of Jankyn's Book', *Mediaeval Studies* 34 (1972): 196–207; Ralph Hanna, 'Jankyn's Book', *Pacific Coast Philology* 21 (1986): 30–6, describing the book as 'a visual token of male textuality and domination' (p. 34); Karla Taylor, 'Chaucer's Volumes: Toward a New Model of Literary History in the *Canterbury Tales*', *Studies in the Age of Chaucer* 29 (2007): 43–85. Folkloric parallels and analogues are explored in John M. Steadman, 'The Book-Burning Episode in the Wife of Bath's Prologue: Some Additional Analogues', *PMLA* 74 (1959): 521–5.
8. See Bartlett Jere Whiting, *Proverbs, Sentences, and Proverbial Phrases from English Writings Mainly Before 1500* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 1968), #B458, with four instances.
9. See Eamon Duffy, *Marking the Hours: English People and their Prayers, 1240–1570* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006), pp. 23–51, for a variety of personalized religious books; Kathryn Rudy, 'Dirty Books: Quantifying Patterns of Use in Medieval Manuscripts Using a Densitometer', *Journal of Historians of Netherlandish Art* 2 (2010) (<<http://www.jhna.org/index.php/past-issues/volume-2-issue-1-2/129-dirty-books>>), exploring medieval religious books which have been 'damaged' – i.e. marked – through use, often through kissing and other kinds of intense, physical interaction.
10. For instance, London, British Library Add. MS 59856, a fifteenth-century missal from Sussex, from which the image of the Crucifixion has been removed, likely for separate devotion. The preciousness of the image was evidently more important than the integrity of the book. For further examples, see Kathryn Rudy, 'Kissing Images, Unfurling Rolls, Measuring Wounds, Sewing Badges and Carrying Talismans: Considering Some Harley Manuscripts through the Physical Rituals they Reveal', *Electronic British Library Journal* (2011): 1–56: <<http://www.bl.uk/ebj/2011articles/articles.html>>.
11. London, Wellcome Historical Medical Library MS 632. See Anthony Bale, *The Jew in the Medieval Book: English Antisemitisms 1350–1500* (Cambridge:

- 1 Cambridge University Press, 2006), pp. 158–60 for a discussion of this
2 manuscript.
- 3 12. For a conspectus of such marks, including potent examples of cancelled and
4 excised text from the Middle Ages to the present day, see Roger Stoddard,
5 *Marks in Books, Illustrated and Explained* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard, 1985) and
6 Robin Alston, *Books With Manuscript* (London: British Library, 1994).
- 7 13. See Duffy, *Marking the Hours*, pp. 152–62, with potent examples; also
8 Robert E. Scully, 'The Unmaking of a Saint: Thomas Becket and the English
9 Reformation', *Catholic Historical Review* 86 (2000): 579–602.
- 10 14. London, British Library Add. MS 6157.
- 11 15. See Scully, 'The Unmaking of a Saint', pp. 594, 596.
- 12 16. The standard description is Consuelo Dutschke et al., *Guide to Medieval and
13 Renaissance Manuscripts in the Huntington Library* (San Marino: Huntington
14 Library, 1989), 1.181–3. Dutschke's is a thorough description, but it does
15 differentiate between the names of the book's male 'owners' and, rather
16 dismissively, 'a series of scribbles in the same sixteenth century hand ...
17 often contain[ing] the name of Dorothy Helbarton'. Dutschke's description
18 is supplemented by Daniel Wakelin, 'Caxton's Exemplar for The Chronicles
19 of England?', *Journal of the Early Book Society* 14 (2011): 55–83, which shows
20 Caxton's use of the manuscript, and Anthony Bale, 'Late Medieval Book-
21 Owners Named John Leche', *Bodleian Library Record* 25 (2012): 105–12,
22 describing the earliest known owner of the manuscript.
- 23 17. On the *Brut*, see Lister M. Matheson, *The Prose "Brut": The Development of
24 a Middle English Chronicle* (Tempe, AZ: Medieval & Renaissance Texts and
25 Studies, 1998).
- 26 18. Seymour de Ricci, *Census of Medieval and Renaissance Manuscripts in the
27 United States and Canada*, 3 vols. (New York: H. W. Wilson, 1935–40), 3.56,
28 dated the hand to c.1500; Ralph Hanna, 'The Index of Middle English Verse
29 and the Huntington Library Collections: A Checklist of Addenda', *Papers of
30 the Bibliographical Society of America* 74 (1980): 235–58, and William Ringler,
31 *Bibliography and Index of English Verse in Manuscript 1501–1558* (London:
32 Mansell, 1992), p. 224, date it to the early sixteenth century; Dutschke states
33 that the hand is of the sixteenth century; whilst Schulz's description, on
34 file at the Huntington Library, gives the date of the hand as late sixteenth
35 century.
- 36 19. The scribe possibly inserted his rebus on f. 108r, where a marginal device has
37 been drafted three times, appearing to knit the upper-case letters K and R or
38 K, A and R; he also placed a scribal device on f. 120v ('by thys ...'), which
39 has been scribbled over, apparently by the scribe himself. Further research
40 to identify this rebus and/or the scribe may yield a more detailed context for
41 Helbarton's bookplates. A third rebus, a lower-case 'd' inside a six-pointed
star, appears on the final fly-leaves (f. (vii)r, Figure 5.2, and may represent
Dorothy Helbarton herself. The six-pointed star was the sign of brewers'
guilds.
20. Likewise, the inscription on f. 77v, 'Thys ys Dorethe Helbartoun boke Who
wishes[?] ym beste to haue'. This is a variant of a common motto; see
Ringler, *Bibliography*, #1975.
21. William Sherman, *Used Books: Marking Readers in Renaissance England*
(Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008), p. 15. For example,

- 1 compare Huntington Library MS HM 127, 'This is Iohn Whyttes Boke/ whoo
2 so euer on yt dothe louke/ he that fydyth yt and brynges yt agayne/ I wyll
3 geyfe him xl d. for his payene' (f. ir).
- 4 22. Likewise, 'Moste truyst yt ys her boke And I wyll say so' and 'I Wyll tel
5 yow playne yt ys her boke Wet nes of me' (f. 16), 'mys yow of nothyng
6 of that yow have sayde' (f. 61r), 'Jhesu saue her that do howe thys boke'
7 (f. 63r), 'Mystrys dorethe god bouth saue and se / And graunte enow
8 that she may knowthe verete' (f. 75r), 'by my honeste thys ys her boke'
9 (f. 107r).
- 10 23. On the relationship of clean pages to godliness, see Sherman, *Used Books*,
11 pp. 154–63.
- 12 24. 'Mare' here is understood as an interjection of indignation, i.e. 'Who is the
13 owner of this book? Marry! Turn over the leaf and look'.
- 14 25. i.e. 'You do own this book'.
- 15 26. On the epigram 'At owre beginynnyng God be my spede / Wyth grace and
16 vertue to procede', see Ringler, *Bibliography*, #220, describing six similar
17 instances of this motto, but not noting Huntington Library MS HM 125,
18 f. 98v, 'In my begynnyng god be my good spede In grace & vertue allways to
19 prosed. Chrystefer Byrkheade'; it was also used on samplers into the eight-
20 century.
- 21 27. I understand 'mare' here (as at f. 100r) to be the interjection 'marry',
22 expressing indignation or surprise, i.e. 'Who gave her this book? Marry! Her
23 mother!' An inscription on f. 20r seems to read 'Thys ys D B boke'.
- 24 28. Likewise, in another inscription the scribe states 'I pray god she may have
25 lovnge Aponym to loke' (f. 114r).
- 26 29. Sherman, *Used Books*, p. 23.
- 27 30. H. J. Jackson, "'Marginal frivolities": Readers' Notes as Evidence for the
28 History of Reading', in Robin Myers, Michael Harris and Giles Mandelbrote
29 (eds), *Owners, Annotators and the Signs of Reading* (New Castle, DE and
30 London: Oak Knoll Press, 2005), pp. 137–52, p.137.
- 31 31. Francis Dorrington (c.1531–1614) was from a wealthy Staffordshire and
32 Cheshire family, distantly related by marriage to the original owners of
33 HM 136, the Leches of Nantwich. John Dorrington, Francis's father, was
34 Royal Bear-Master in the 1560s, a position that would likely have brought
35 him into contact with books at and around court. Francis Dorrington also
36 read or owned another medieval manuscript (Mirfield, Community of the
37 Resurrection MS 4, *Processionale*) which bears the sixteenth-century signature
38 of 'F. Dorrington', together with that of 'John Doryngtone' (see *MMBL* 3.481–3).
39 Francis Dorrington's will shows that he did own some (unnamed) books, as
40 one would expect; these were inherited by his eldest son Marmaduke (Kew,
41 National Archives PROB 11/118).
32. Lisa Jardine and Anthony Grafton, 'Studied for Action: How Gabriel Harvey
Read his Livy', *Past & Present* 129 (1990): 30–78, p. 40.
33. On Leche's collection of books see Bale, 'Late Medieval Book-Owners'.
34. The notable exception is Jason Scott-Warren, 'Reading Graffiti in the Early
Modern Book', *Huntington Library Quarterly* 73 (2010): 363–81; this article
includes an account of 50 ownership inscriptions written by John Finet in
his book (pp. 366–7).
35. Sherman, *Used Books*, p. 5.

- 1 36. Stephen Orgel, 'Margins of Truth', in Andrew Murphy (ed.), *The Renaissance*
- 2 *Text: Theory, Editing, Textuality* (Manchester: Manchester University Press,
- 3 *2000), pp. 91–107.*
- 4 37. Orgel, 'Margins', p. 107.
- 5 38. London, British Library Harley MS 2966, f. 1r.
- 6 39. Takamiya MS 32 (*olim* Delamere MS).
- 7 40. London, British Library Add. MS 25178.
- 8 41. San Marino, Huntington Library MS 26.C.9, f. 1v.
- 9 42. i.e. 'the leader of all evil'.
- 10 43. See David Pearson, *Provenance Research in Book History* (London: British
- 11 Library, 1994), p. 16; Durham University Library, Cosin MS V.iii.9, f. 36r
- 12 (dating from c.1550).
- 13 44. i.e. 'This book is one and Christ's curse is another / He that steals thy book
- 14 take they the other'. San Marino, Huntington Library MS HM 140, f. 170v.
- 15 This is written in an informal mid-sixteenth-century hand below a formal
- 16 early Tudor bookplate: 'This is master Turnars Boke testes Johan dolman
- 17 Jamys crock And master harrowd gentillman. Thomas miseracione divina'
- 18 and three name-tags of 'ha ri gar de nar' (f. 171v, thrice), presumably Harry
- 19 Gardener. This composite volume, the ownership of which opens a fasci-
- 20 nating window on Tudor London, has passed through the hands or under
- 21 the eyes of at least twelve reader-owners between c.1500 and c.1600, all of
- 22 whom left their name in it (see John M. Manly and Edith Rickert, *The Text*
- 23 *of the Canterbury Tales*, 8 vols (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1940),
- 24 1:436–8). These include William Marshall, who bound it in its present form
- 25 and drafted various legal obligations with the book, including those follow-
- 26 ing the purchase of a horse (f. 98r). On the remarkably widespread book-
- 27 curse, see Marc Drogin, *Anathema! Medieval Scribes and the History of Book*
- 28 *Curses* (Totowa, NJ: Allanheld & Osmun, 1983).
- 29 45. San Marino, Huntington Library MS HM 502, f. 56r.
- 30 46. London, British Library Harley MS 7334, f. 286v.
- 31 47. Cambridge, University Library 2117, p. aa6.
- 32 48. On these issues see P. J. P. Goldberg, 'Lay Book Ownership in Late Medieval
- 33 York: The Evidence of Wills', *The Library* 6.16.3 (1994): 181–9.
- 34 49. San Marino, Huntington Library MS HM 129, f. 231r. On the verso, there
- 35 are three crossed-out sixteenth-century ownerships marks referring to the
- 36 'boke'.
- 37 50. The medieval and early modern erasure or deletion of ownership marks is
- 38 separate from the wholesale nineteenth-century destruction of marginalia.
- 39 Sherman has described how some 40% of the incunabula owned by the
- 40 Huntington Library show signs of having been bleached, washed, cropped
- 41 or rebound in such a way as to efface the marginalia. Sherman, *Used Books*,

53. Michael Camille, 'Glossing the Flesh: Scopophilia and the Margins of the Medieval Book', in David C. Greetham (ed.), *The Margins of the Text* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1991), pp. 245–68, p. 261.
54. Fleming, *Graffiti*, pp. 41–2.
55. Fleming, *Graffiti*, p. 41.
56. Scott-Warren, 'Graffiti', p. 373; see too Sherman, *Used Books*, p. 23.
57. e.g. 'Master John hammultone dwylling in Sent Jeyllis parishe with-ought cripulgat', Huntington Library MS HM 140, f. 123r.
58. In its classical sense, a *graffito* is writing scratched on a surface, and suggestive of a kind of unofficial or ephemeral scribbling. In its modern sense, from the mid-twentieth century, graffiti has come to be understood as 'illegal' or 'forbidden' public writing: both sense are pertinent to this discussion.
59. H. J. Jackson, *Marginalia: Readers Writing in Books* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001), p. 14.
60. For stimulating discussions of the uses of marginalia in early reading, see Mary Carruthers, *The Book of Memory*, 2nd edn. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), esp. pp. 135–46; Sabrina Alcorn Baron, 'Red Ink and Black Letter: Reading Early Modern Authority', in Sabrina Alcorn Baron (ed.), *The Reader Revealed* (Washington, DC: Folger Shakespeare Library, 2001), pp. 19–29.
61. In discussing the literacy of the medieval laity, Malcolm Parkes divided medieval readers into three groups: 'professional' readers (scholars and clerics; men of letters), 'cultivated' readers (reading for recreation), and 'pragmatic' readers (which includes reading and writing for the purposes of administration or commerce, and also reading for the improvement of the reader's soul or social class). This third group is the hardest to identify, and most difficult to reconstruct in terms of reading habits. M. B. Parkes, 'The Literacy of the Laity', in David Daiches and Anthony Thorlby (eds), *Literature and Western Civilization: The Mediaeval World* (London: Aldus Books 1973), pp. 555–77.
62. See Sherman, *Used Books*, pp. 3–5, on the role of basic education in teaching readers how to annotate their books.
63. Camille, 'Glossing the Flesh'.
64. Jackson, *Marginalia*, p. 179.
65. See further Sherman's comments on the 'matriarchive' which can be explored through women's marks in books; *Used Books*, pp. 53–70.

6

Doctoring Victorian Literature – *A Humument*: An interview with Tom Phillips

Adam Smyth, Gill Partington and Tom Phillips

Tom Phillips (b. 1937) is a painter, printmaker and collagist, and the creator of *A Humument: A Treated Victorian Novel* (1970, 1980, 1986, 1998, 2004, and in 2010 as an iPhone and iPad app), a critically lauded blend of destruction and creativity. In 1965, Phillips, fascinated by the cut-up techniques of William Burroughs, bought a copy of W. H. Mallock's forgotten novel, *A Human Document* (1892), from a second-hand furniture store in south London, and set about turning it into something new: *A Humument*. Each page was 'treated': the majority of the text obscured by painted images to leave visible a trickle of words that told a new story – the love between Irma and Toge (the latter appearing whenever Mallock wrote 'together').

Phillips has had major solo exhibitions of his work at the National Portrait Gallery (1989); the Royal Academy of Arts (1993); the Dulwich Picture Gallery (1997); the South London Gallery (1997); and at the Modern Art Museum, Fort Worth (2001). Phillips is also a writer and a composer, and recently collaborated with Tarik O'Regan on a chamber opera of Joseph Conrad's novella *Heart of Darkness* (Royal Opera House, Covent Garden, 2011).

The following conversation took place on 16 September 2011, at the South London Gallery, between Tom Phillips (TP), Gill Partington (GP) and Adam Smyth (AS).

AS: Do you have many academic visitors asking you about your work?

TP: Not many come to see me.

GP: Last week I was at a conference about book eating, in Cambridge. One of the speakers was talking about cannibalism and your work: she thought that *A Humument* was a kind of cannibalism.

1 TP: Yes, it's cannibalising something. That's true.

2

3 GP: I think she picked up something you said in the introduction about
4 *The Human Document* as a feast.

5

6 TP: I suppose so. That's quite good. Since we're having lunch.

7

8 AS: How do you feel about people having these kinds of readings of
9 your work?

10

11 TP: There was once a conference about me. Little me. It was in Rouen.
12 All in French. Luckily I speak French. Although I understood French
13 perfectly I couldn't understand a word they said. It was in the middle
14 of the high structuralist times. It was amazing. The gibberish. They
15 took a text that my mother had written – my mother! About me being
16 a child. This guy spent an hour deconstructing my mother's writing.
17 Something's going wrong here. Something's going wrong. This guy tied
18 these totally different things together. The absurdity of it.

19

20 AS: But you like surprising connections?

21

22 TP: I love connections, but when they're not connections, it doesn't
23 join together. It's like having magnets pointing the wrong way.

24

25 GP: Connection's a big theme – 'only connect'. The different pages
26 connect together. Are those connections somehow in the Mallock text,
27 waiting to be uncovered?

28

29 TP: No, I don't think that for a minute. They're in the Mallock text wait-
30 ing to be discovered, but not in an active sense. In a passive or innocent
31 sense. Innocent of what is done to them. What is done to them might
32 enrich them (Figure 6.1). At least it saved Mallock from obscurity.

33

34 GP: Mallock is back in print now. So you've revived him.

35

36 TP: Well there we are then. Cheers. [glasses clink]

37

38 GP: No one would read Mallock now if it wasn't for *A Humument*.

39

40 TP: Well, he [Mallock] did write a book that is still respected in philo-
41 sophical circles. But as a novel ... he's not a bad writer. There's not much

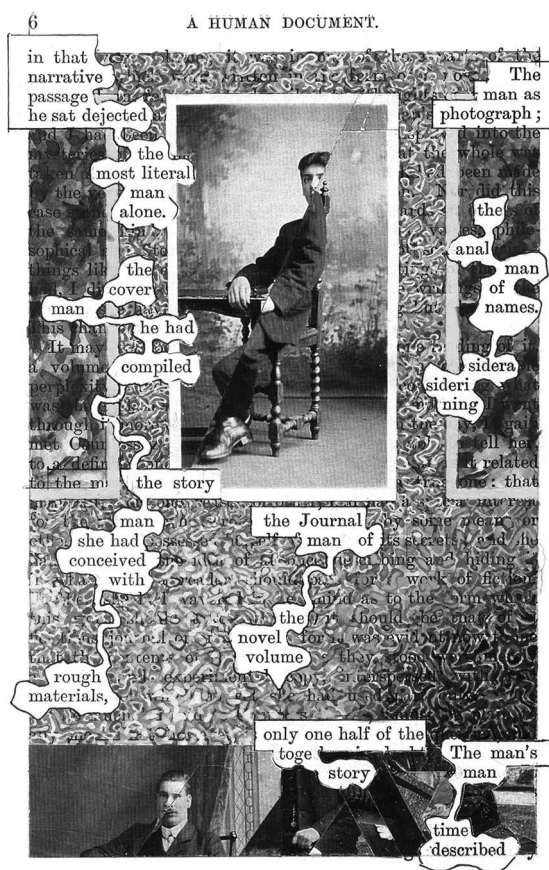


Figure 6.1 Tom Phillips, *A Humument* (2011 edition © Tom Phillips. All Rights Reserved, DACS 2013)

in his life, so to speak, that has gristle and muscle. In the end I've grown to respect the book quite a lot: the quality of the writing. People wrote very well then [in 1892] anyway. People generally write badly now.

GP: People now will read Mallock after reading *A Humument*, and so they're reading Mallock as a secondary text. You've become the original.

TP: That's very intriguing. It would be really nice if someone said 'I just read *The Human Document* and it's the most brilliant novel ever, and it's

1 absolutely disgraceful that you've mucked around with it.' The copy
2 of *The Human Document* that Oscar Wilde had in his room also has an
3 interference in it.

4
5 GP: What kind?

6
7 TP: He spilt some jam on it. The librarian in charge of the Oscar Wilde
8 collection pointed this out. Rather nice, isn't it? So I'm not the first per-
9 son to muck around with it. Lots of them have marginalia. Secret love
10 messages in the margins.

11
12 AS: What do you feel towards Mallock? Do you feel affection? Do you
13 feel you've been involved in a decades' long collaboration?

14
15 TP: Well, I owe him rather a lot. I owe him most because his book is jolly
16 good to use. His vocabulary is very large. His syntax is interesting, from
17 my point of view. I've looked at other books since, thinking what if it
18 was this book I'd chanced upon, because I did chance upon it, in 1966.
19 And I have a witness, now dead. Ron Kitaj [American artist who lived in
20 London, died 2007]. I said to Ron, 'I'll just choose the first book I find
21 for three pence.' He said, 'Yeah, yeah.' So that was the first book I chose.
22 They had a rack of books outside a furniture store.

23
24 GP: So you made a rule for yourself.

25
26 TP: I'm always making rules. I'm ruled by Mallock.

27
28 GP: Do you have rules when you're making *A Humument*?

29
30 TP: Try and find something good, is the first rule. And the second rule
31 is not to muck about with it. Not to change the place of the page.
32 I'm tied to that. I do little variations but they all scrupulously fall in
33 where they fall. I'm not supposed to cart in loads of stuff from other
34 sources.

35
36 GP: Sometimes you use postcards.

37
38 TP: Sometimes I use postcards. They belong to me. Anything that
39 belongs to me or that I have done I can reuse. These rules were quite
40 severe at first, but then the first version was open cast mining – finding
41 what I could on the surface (Figure 6.2).

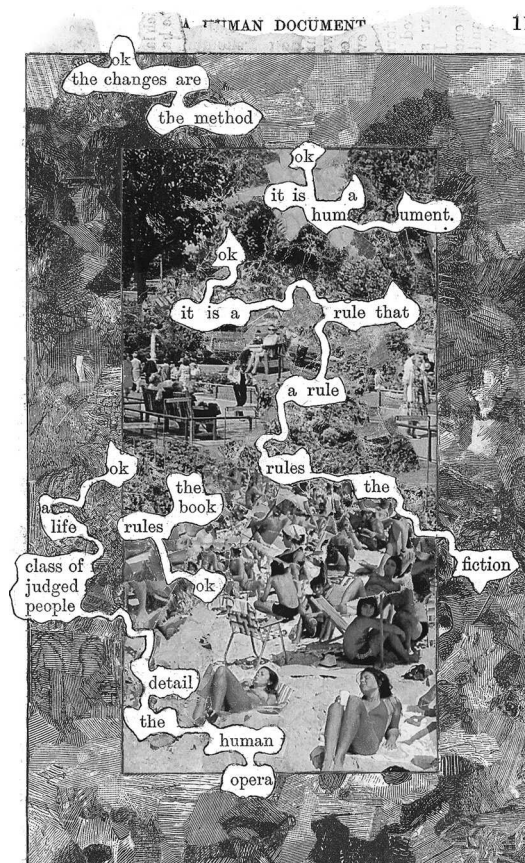


Figure 6.2 Tom Phillips, *A Humument* (2011 edition © Tom Phillips. All Rights Reserved, DACS 2013)

GP: And now you're ...?

TP: Now I'm going a bit deeper, I think, into me and it. It's too late to do that again: it's taken me 45 years to get to this point. I've still got a 100 pages to go in the reworking.

GP: Sometimes the original text comes through a lot. There are pages where Mallock is a kind of ghost. A ghostly presence.

1 AS: There are other moments when a whole chunk of his text appears
2 continuously. [points to page]

3
4 TP: That doesn't survive in the second version. [reads] 'youthful guards-
5 man ... water parties ... drawing room ... ease at it ... armchairs...knick-
6 knacks' [laughter]

7
8 GP: It's filthy in the original.

9
10 AS: He knew what he was up to, Mallock.

11
12 GP: But that voice – his voice – is quite different to the voice that comes
13 across.

14
15 TP: Absolutely. There are many voices. His is one voice.

16
17 AS: Is there your voice here? Can we read it in an autobiographical way?
18 At some points you refer in the text to your age at the time of producing
19 the text. Is this in some ways an autobiography?

20
21 TP: An autobiography is lodged in it. Yes. I'll never write an autobi-
22 ography, so I have an autobiography that appears in this form. Now
23 of course there are other ways like having a blog. So you don't have
24 to remember things because you write them down at the time. I can't
25 remember anything anyway. I've no idea of past time. Long or short
26 stretches. I'm that far out.

27
28 AS: Can I ask about whether you see this as part of a tradition of book-
29 making. You read that *Paris Review* interview with Burroughs [in 1965].

30
31 TP: I went to see Burroughs. The two dead people I got to show this book
32 to: one was Richard Hamilton who died this week; the other was William
33 Burroughs who died earlier on. William Burroughs was very generous in
34 a terrifying kind of way. He said it's okay, and why wasn't it science fic-
35 tion? I had a very tough day with him. Very fierce. Incredible. Fearsome.

36
37 AS: But he was really engaging with what you'd produced?

38
39 TP: Very much. He was generous in that sense. He took a day out of
40 his life to spend with me. Not that we had lunch or things like that.
41 An entirely bare room with nothing to sit on. Agony, the whole thing.

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1 AS: So Burroughs is one key figure. Are there other key works that you
2 see yourself in relation to?

3
4 TP: Everything that's ever done, yes. I read a lot. I just think one has
5 certain adequacies; one has certain inadequacies. One has certain tal-
6 ents, and one has certain bits that one can't nourish up to any standard.
7 So I'm not really a poet but my capacity to be such is exercised in this
8 book.

9
10 GP: But you can read it as a poem.

11
12 TP: It is a poem. It is a poem. That's what it is. My poem. It's as near as
13 I get.

14
15 GP: That question about a genre or a tradition you see yourself in. In
16 1966 when you started *A Humument*, Jean Rhys published *Wide Sargasso*
17 *Sea* [a response to *Jane Eyre*].

18
19 TP: A connection.

20
21 GP: Are you like Jean Rhys, rewriting a Victorian novel? Is that a tradi-
22 tion you're in?

23
24 TP: That's a horrible book anyway. It's a remake.

25
26 GP: But is your book a similar kind of remaking?

27
28 TP: I think that theory is ... up a gum tree. [Starts to impersonate Orson
29 Welles saying 'Jane, Jane'.]

30
31 AS: Can I ask you about two other texts? Have you seen Jonathan Safran
32 Foer's *The Tree of Codes*?

33
34 TP: Jonathan! Jonathan came to see me about ten years ago. He said he
35 really liked *A Humument*; he said he wanted to meet the maker thereof.
36 Very likeable guy. We spent a bit of time chatting about it, which I'm
37 not very interested in doing: I do it, you know; you can't really be inter-
38 ested in what you do. You do what you do, and that's more interesting.
39 I said, you're a small, Jewish novelist. You must play ping-pong. They
40 all do. He said, yeah, yeah. I said, I've a studio geared for international
41 ping-pong round the corner. Then he said, how much? What do you

1 mean how much? He said, how much you bet on yourself to beat me?
2 I said, we don't do that in England. I sounded like Mallock: 'That's not
3 how we behave in England.' So we did have a game and I beat him of
4 course.

5
6 AS: What do you think of *The Tree of Codes*?

7
8 TP: It's a bit painful because ... He didn't half borrow from me! It's
9 clever, isn't it? I wouldn't want to look at it, would you?

10
11 AS: I read it last night and it's quite a labour. Just the material process
12 of reading it, because you have to hold each page at a particular angle.

13
14 TP: It doesn't invite me in.

15
16 AS: And there's no humour.

17
18 TP: Humour isn't a big thing with the Safran Foer work. Vegetarianism
19 is more of a big thing. And he's got a dog as big as a horse. That spoilt
20 our last game of ping-pong in Brooklyn. He's nice. His brother's nice,
21 too. His mum and dad, who I looked after in Princeton last year, they're
22 nice.

23
24 AS: Can I ask you about another text from 1630?

25
26 TP: I don't know him, nor his mum and dad.

27
28 AS: This is made at Little Gidding, the religious community in the 1630s,
29 who bought printed gospels and cut them up and reordered the text to
30 iron out the differences between the different lives of Christ. [Shows an
31 image of a cut-and-paste Gospel Harmony.]

32
33 TP: I've never seen this before. [reads text]

34
35 AS: It seemed to me quite like what you're up to. [reads]

36
37 GP: Did you ever come across another Peckham artist, John Latham?

38
39 TP: Of course, of course, I know him well. Knew him well.

40
41 GP: Did you talk to him much about books?

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1 TP: Like most artists I meet, we talked about money, women, publishers,
2 things that are wrong in the world, the Royal Academy.

3
4 GP: But he never belonged to the Royal Academy.

5
6 TP: He was never invited, through no fault of mine. John Latham was
7 almost our most famous obscure artist.

8
9 GP: The book was a big motif in his work, and he spent a lot of time dis-
10 membering books. Are there any parallels between him and your work?

11
12 TP: No. No. His was a sculptural thing. An attitude. I don't have an
13 attitude.

14
15 GP: You don't have an attitude?

16
17 TP: He had an attitude, to culture, to life. An attitude that faces up
18 towards lots of things in life: politics and stuff. I don't. Apart from when
19 I was a child knowing that the Young Conservatives in Clapham, where
20 I grew up, had a much better ping-pong table than Young Labour, and
21 that made me a member of the Young Conservatives for quite a time.
22 Priorities.

23
24 GP: How would you characterise your outlook, then? When I read *A*
25 *Humument* it seems mischievous and it seems funny.

26
27 TP: If life isn't funny, then what is it? It's either fucking tragic, or
28 hilarious.

29
30 GP: But it's mischievous in a way that makes a point. There are things
31 you want to talk about and you bring to life from the Mallock text. It's
32 very sexual.

33
34 TP: The Mallock text is very sexual: it's a battened down aspect to the
35 book. They do have sex: it's hardly perceptible.

36
37 GP: But you want to make it very perceptible.

38
39 TP: Well sex is interesting. It's ceased to be of interest to me now, which
40 is in itself interesting. It occupies one's attention for certain periods of
41 one's life, i.e. most of it. But it wasn't a mentionable topic [in 1892]:

1 there was no way of dealing with it, for him. Either in his life, or in his
2 work. I have a large collection of other books by W. H. Mallock. If you
3 ever need to read him or consult him.

4
5 GP: Do you enjoy reading him?

6
7 TP: I haven't really read one, to be frank. I haven't even read *A Human*
8 *Document*, as a book.

9
10 GP: So when you bought it, you started work on it straight away?

11
12 TP: I found things of interest in it. I didn't realise it would go on so long.
13 I'm still doing it.

14
15 GP: Will it ever be finished?

16
17 TP: I've got 100 pages to go in the new edition. So I've either got to
18 speed up, because I've not got time to live, or I have to slow down,
19 because by the time I've finished, I shall lose some of the urgency to
20 carry on living.

21
22 AS: What's the relationship between the early editions and the later
23 ones? I have the 1980 one here. Do the later editions supersede the
24 earlier ones?

25
26 TP: Every edition adds new pages (Figure 6.3).

27
28 GP: But how do you decide which pages to revise?

29
30 TP: Something springs up or it doesn't. With about five exceptions I
31 could do better.

32
33 GP: Is there a definitive edition? Could this go on forever?

34
35 TP: It could, but the guy doing it couldn't. He's amazed himself going
36 on this far. The definitive edition would be an old-fashioned variorum
37 edition, with all the fragments, all the bits I've used on postcards, all
38 brought together.

39
40 AS: You can imagine that kind of edition working well online. You began
41 *A Humument* in the '60s and now today there are digital possibilities for

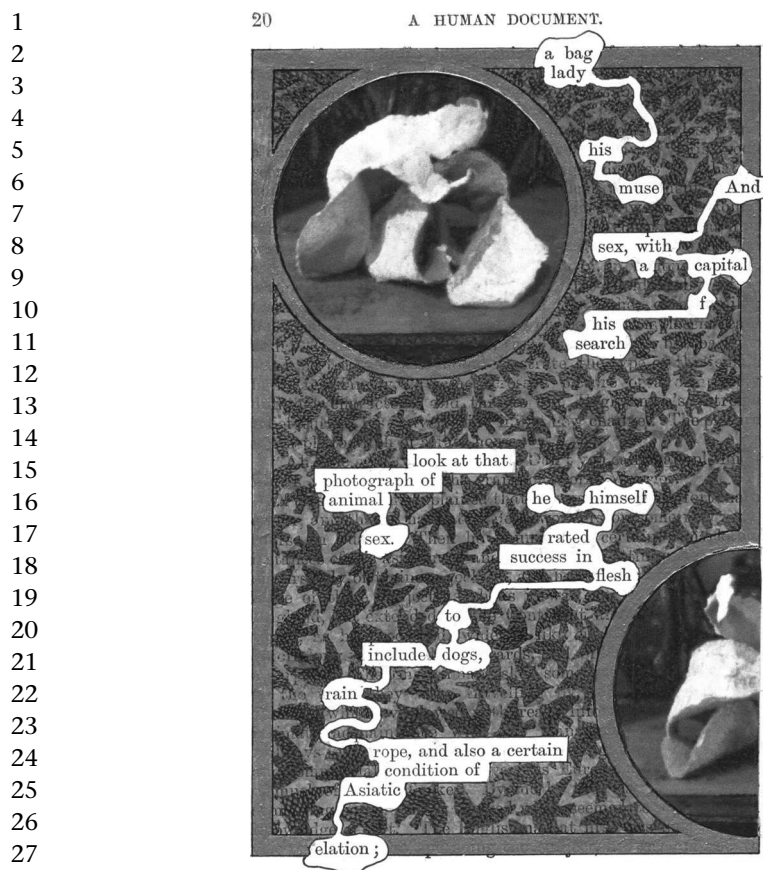


Figure 6.3 Tom Phillips, *A Humument* (2011 edition © Tom Phillips. All Rights Reserved, DACS 2013)

publishing. Can you say something about the app, and what possibilities the app presents?

TP: The app's even better. It's better than the book.

GP: Why?

TP: Because the pages have not gone yellow.

1 GP: But isn't *A Humument* an object, a material thing, something we
2 need to hold in our hands?

3
4 AS: Don't we lose something with the app?

5
6 TP: It's different. It's like church windows: brighter, better, cleaner.
7 That's how we like the world to be.

8
9 GP: But don't you like paper?

10
11 TP: Of course I do. That's obvious from my house. But I like these other
12 things, too. I like the app. I wouldn't mind a film of it.

13
14 AS: Can I ask you about the humour? When I read *A Humument*, my
15 most frequent reaction is to laugh.

16
17 TP: That's the kind of person I'm trying to avoid. [laughs] It's a serious
18 piece.

19
20 AS: Could you say a little about the humour – how it works? The humour
21 and the sex overlap a lot. I wrote down a couple of lines I particularly
22 liked. 'Evening Arthur, calm your member.' That was a good one.

23
24 TP: 'Evening Arthur, calm your member.'

25
26 AS: And then: 'A month in Yorkshire with Stanley's rear.' That's great.
27 I'd call my autobiography that. Is the humour to do with having that
28 1892 Mallock register produce these surprising phrases?

29
30 TP: Exactly. You won't remember the music hall. The reference in music
31 hall was always to serious things. There was a man who used to do an
32 act called 'Brush up your Shakespeare.' It was fed by culture. Things are
33 sort of divided now, so rubbish is entirely rubbish. For the first time in
34 my experience.

35
36 AS: So music hall was a popular mode that had these high cultural
37 references.

38
39 TP: Absolutely. Even historical references. Very sophisticated. [sings] 'As
40 I walk along the Bois Boolong with an independent air, I can hear the
41 girls declare, he must be a millionaire, I'm the man that broke the bank in

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1 Monte Carlo.' There is a lot of reference in that, already. [sings] 'I'm Henry
2 the Eighth I am, Henry the Eighth I am, I am ...' It's a referential world.
3 So the world is rich. The world is rich when it refers to itself all the time.

4
5 AS: Does music hall live on anywhere now?

6
7 TP: There are good standup comedians, brilliant comedians. The most
8 brilliant thing I saw, better than music hall, was *The Life of Brian*. Also
9 done by friends of mine. Terry Jones is a very close friend. I've played
10 ping-pong with every one of the Pythons, except the one who died.

11
12 GP: You've played ping-pong with every famous person.

13
14 AS: Are you more forehand or backhand in ping-pong?

15
16 TP: I have to be very sly because I can't move very quickly. I increase in
17 artfulness as I lose in movement.

18
19 GP: If you played Mallock in ping-pong who would win?

20
21 TP: [pause] Would he cheat? It hardly existed in his day. It was called
22 whim-wham or whiff-waff. It was invented around his time in the
23 clubs of India by people playing with a cigar box and champagne cork.
24 Mallock would have a firm game. He'd have a polished game.

25
26 GP: If you could have a conversation with Mallock, what would you
27 say? What would you make of him? You said before [in the introduction
28 to *A Humument*] you thought he seems unpleasant.

29
30 TP: He does. I said that then. I said that in 1966. Now I'd say he was bruised.

31
32 GP: It seems you have more respect for him now.

33
34 TP: I do. I have more time for people who have lived their life and it
35 hasn't turned out as they hoped.

36
37 AS: How was he bruised?

38
39 TP: He had a big affair, which is reflected in *A Human Document*. And
40 other books. And it was impossible for him, because he was locked into
41 the aristocratic breed that he was. Although he ended up an isolated

1 figure, with just one manservant, dying nowhere at all and buried
2 inconspicuously in 1926. So yes, I feel sorrow for him. I'm more sympa-
3 thetic to life's elderly losers than I used to be.

4
5 GP: You revise the text to reflect current events, don't you?

6
7 TP: Like 9/11. On the app. That was a good one, wasn't it?

8
9 GP: So it is continually updating.

10
11 AS: How do readers read your book? Do you have a sense of how readers
12 will consume this? In a linear way?

13
14 TP: I thought I guided them to do exactly as I wished them to do.

15
16 GP: What about the stuff that isn't text? Because it's not just reading.
17 It's using the images, too.

18
19 TP: One feeds the other. What would you do?

20
21 GP: I was immediately struck here by this illustration [shows page of
22 phallic image].

23
24 TP: That's nothing to do with me. That's you. That's your mind. That's
25 your problem (Figure 6.4).

26
27 GP: But it is a book in which you ask the reader to do a lot. Things they
28 wouldn't do if they were reading the Mallock.

29
30 TP: I think they'd find the Mallock harder work.

31
32 GP: This is reading of a different order [shows page]. There's text, there's
33 image. There's a kind of synaesthesia; it tries to involve all the senses.
34 You're trying to expand the book and also to get the reader to interact
35 with it in a different way.

36
37 TP: I hope they enjoy it, that's all. And buy it. Buy it folks!

38
39 AS: Do you think, in terms of novels in the last 30, 40 years, that *A*
40 *Humument* has had a big influence? Can you see its ripples in other
41 works? In mainstream books?

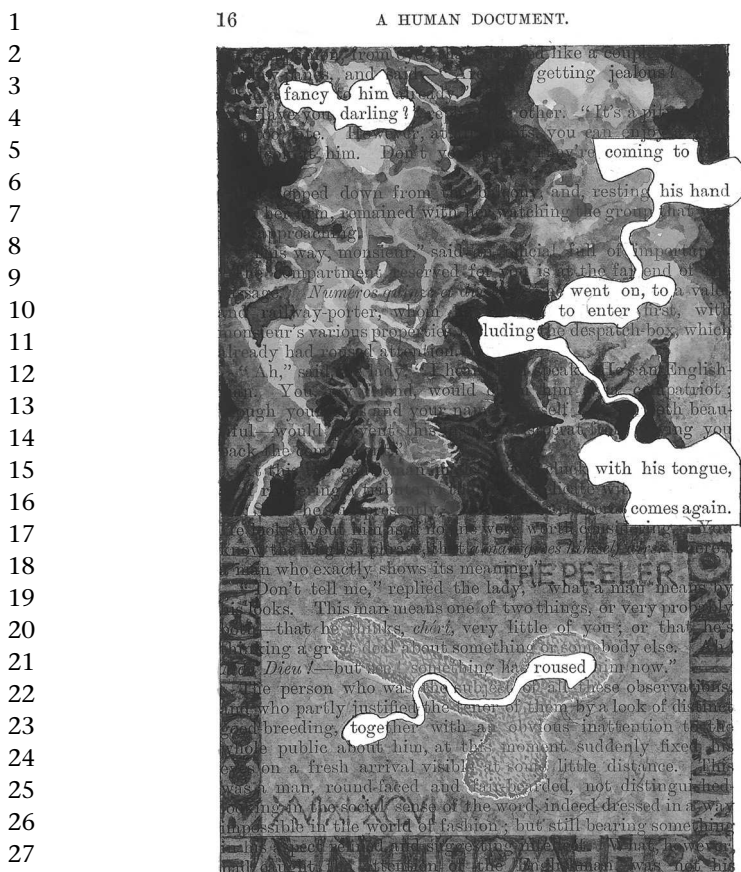


Figure 6.4 Tom Phillips, *A Humument* (2011 edition © Tom Phillips. All Rights Reserved, DACS 2013)

TP: Not really, no. Should I? I don't think so.

GP: Is the treated novel an isolated thing?

TP: As far as I know it's the only one. I can't think of another one. And when I started there wasn't anything of the kind at all. Nothing.

GP: There are quite a few pages that look like comics [shows page]

1 TP: Made of comics. Made of. American comics I've used there. It's
2 about Mr Bush, isn't it? [points to page] I was influenced by American
3 comics in 1944, 1945. We used to get food parcels from America, in the
4 war; even after the war. My aunt was American. She used to wrap the
5 things in American comics, which I and my brother latched on to very
6 quickly. The first art work I ever did was a copy of the cover of a *Batman*
7 comic, DC comics 31 as it so happens. Which I love. The bat cave. Bat
8 mobile. Still pretty good image, I think. The colours are beautiful. The
9 writing's nice. There's quite a lot of that influence. I'm paying back my
10 respect to the idea of the comic now. [pause] We try our best. Wonderful
11 quote from Henry James that I'm working on at the moment: 'We work
12 in the dark. We do what we can. We give what we have. The rest is the
13 madness of art.'

14
15 AS: How are you working on that quote now?

16
17 TP: Mucking about with it. Making a film. Writing music. It writes itself.
18 [sings]

19
20 AS: You've done other musical objects?

21
22 TP: November 1st. Covent Garden. Premiere. *Heart of Darkness*. Your
23 favourite novella. What more could you want?

24
25 GP: How are you creating the libretto for *Heart of Darkness*?

26
27 TP: From the words of Joseph Conrad. Faithfully and religiously.

28
29 GP: How do you define faithfully?

30
31 TP: Not a word in the libretto doesn't come from his book.

32
33 GP: Is it a process of excision?

34
35 TP: Yes, it is excision. The libretto is a fiftieth of the length of the book.

36
37 GP: Do you start with the page, like in *A Humument*?

38
39 TP: There's nothing arty about it.

40
41 GP: That's good to know.

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1 AS: I wanted to ask about terminology. You call this a 'treated' Victorian
2 novel. I was looking at the app, and there are lots of moments when
3 you talk about 'revealing' a story, and 'doctoring' books. What does
4 'treated' mean?

5
6 TP: Treated is changed. I've changed it in this way. And I give it a treat
7 as well. [long pause]

8
9 AS: Do you play ping-pong every day?

10
11 TP: I can't find enough people. I play twice a week.

12
13 AS: Is there any ping-pong in *A Humument*?

14
15 TP: Alas, no. Mallock does not give me any opportunity to talk about
16 ping-pong.

17
18 GP: So there are restrictions to the process, to what you can say in *A*
19 *Humument*?

20
21 TP: Oh yes. But you can get an awful lot out that you didn't think
22 you could. But you don't cheat. If you cheat, you might as well ...
23 forget it.

24
25 GP: What constitutes cheating?

26
27 TP: Shunting things around. Making them convenient.

28
29 AS: Is that out of a respect for Mallock?

30
31 TP: It's a way of making things hard. Like the man who writes the
32 novels never using the letter 'e'. As soon as he uses the letter 'e' he's
33 finished. Forget it. Throw it away.

34
35 GP: So rules are productive for you. They're not restrictive.

36
37 AS: No more than rhyme is, no? Rhyme releases you.

38
39 GP: I wanted to ask about this page [holds up a burnt page, the edges
40 browned]

41

1 TP: Yes, that's gone the way of all flesh now. It belongs to another concept.
2 Concept it a nasty word: it belongs to another idea. Finding ways
3 in which the world will treat a book. Fire, wind, air, rain, snow. But I
4 couldn't do that.

5
6 GP: Why?

7
8 TP: I didn't have the time.

9
10 GP: But this [points to page] is destruction. Destruction's not what you
11 think of yourself as doing?

12
13 TP: I've no interest in destruction at all. Why would I want to destroy
14 a book? Even though I've eaten 11 or 12 copies of *A Human Document*,
15 which are now taken apart, never to be seen again.

16
17 GP: Did you set fire to this yourself?

18
19 TP: It's quite nice but it doesn't fit the idea of the book. It's no longer
20 there [in later editions]. Don't worry about it.

21
22 AS: How long do you work at a single page?

23
24 TP: Couple of months. Or, 4 or 5 hours. Both a couple of months and
25 4 or 5 hours. [pause] I like the Little Gidding pages. Can I have them?

26
27 AS: Yes, of course. Have you written straight fiction, short stories?

28
29 TP: Proper writing?

30
31 AS: I was avoiding the word 'proper'.

32
33 TP: I wrote a novel, like everybody wrote a novel, luckily its unfind-
34 able by anyone. A poor man's Graham Greene. Who wants to be that?
35 Although he did write one of the best books of the twentieth century.

36
37 AS: What's that?

38
39 TP: *The Quiet American*. There are four great short twentieth-century
40 novels. *The Quiet American*. *Heart of Darkness*. *Death in Venice*. *The Turn*

41

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1 of the Screw. Three have become operas, now. Grab the rights while you
2 can of the one that hasn't. I sing every day. My friend Brian, Brian Eno,
3 he says sing every day, and he's absolutely right.

4
5 GP: Have you ever played ping-pong with Brian Eno?

6
7 TP: With Brian? We played a game called piano tennis, which we
8 invented. We had an old piano in Ipswich, I was talking about John
9 Cage. Preparing the pianos. So you bought 4 or 5 old pianos, took
10 them apart, exposed the working. Then we played hand tennis, and the
11 scores were given for how good the sounds were. I don't think he plays
12 ping-pong.

13
14 GP: He's got a similar relationship to rules in his music, hasn't he?

15
16 TP: Where do you think he got that? Where do you think he got that?
17 [laughs] Brian's very bright. He's the only decent student I ever had. I
18 used to teach. Gave it up as soon as I could. [pause] I'm a games player.
19 My work is a kind of game. A serious game. Life's a very serious game.
20 And all things in it are, too. Just as we talked about the rules, what
21 game's worth playing that doesn't have any rules? They always do.

22
23 GP: Does W. H. Mallock supply the rules for *A Humument*?

24
25 TP: He has influence over the book, except that he supplies the material.
26 He conditions the book entirely but doesn't have any influence over it.
27 They're not the same thing.

28
29 GP: You see no limit to the amount of things you can do with the
30 Mallock?

31
32 TP: He's never put up any struggle. In all these years. It's amazing. It
33 amazes me.

34
35 GP: Do you think it's a special kind of book?

36
37 TP: We're not in Harry Potter times. It's not a magic book. There's no
38 destiny. But 9/11. Just look at that page, on your app. [TP starts miming
39 playing the piano.]

40
41 GP: Do you play the piano?

1 TP: I play the table awfully well. [pause] When do you intend this inter-
2 view to come out, to be published?

3
4 GP: Next year, we hope.

5
6 TP: Should I live that long, I shall see it.

7
8 GP: I'm sure you will.

9
10 **Note**

11
12 1. In fact two of these short novels were published in the nineteenth century:
13 *Heart of Darkness* (1899) and *The Turn of the Screw* (1898).

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Proof



Part IV

Degrading

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Proof



7

‘Miss Cathy’s riven th’ back off
 “Th’ Helmet uh Salvation”:
 Representing Book Destruction
 in Mid-Victorian Print Culture

Stephen Colclough

Many of the major novels of the mid-Victorian period were published within a 20-month period in 1847–8, including Ann Brontë’s *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* (1848), Charlotte Brontë’s *Jane Eyre* (1847), Dickens’s *Dombey and Son* (1846–8) and Elizabeth Gaskell’s *Mary Barton* (1848). Both Garrett Stewart and Leah Price have recently paid attention to the way in which the reading of newspapers, tracts and novels is represented in paintings and novels from this period. As Price argues, these ‘embedded’ texts often ‘perform an antiquixotic function: everywhere present in the hands of characters, but nowhere read’ and she wittily argues for her own work as a study of ‘rejection’ rather than ‘reception’.¹ In part, the new cultural authority that was being claimed by the novel at this moment was produced through images that imagined the rejection and negation of other forms of reading. If religious tracts continued to berate the novel reader, the novel made ‘the dullness of tracts a foil to its own pleasures’.² Stewart and Price are mainly concerned with images of ‘pseudoreading’ in which the participants hide behind newspapers, or daydream while reading novels. Despite the frequent appearance in such images of the material text as an object large enough to provide a shield against social interaction, the texts in which they feature often figure the actual response of readers as an immaterial act in which the text becomes ‘disembodied’. As Price notes, Elizabeth Gaskell is just one author from this period who opposes the ornate text bought for show (such as the ‘great, large handsome Bible, all grand and golden’ in *Mary Barton*) with the ‘immaterial’ text actually read.³

However, two novels published within those vital 20 months of the 1840s, Emily Brontë’s *Wuthering Heights* (1847) and Thackeray’s *Vanity Fair* (1847–8), contain images of embodied material texts that are subjected to an anti-social or disobedient (non-)reading practice that

1 leads to their near destruction. Becky Sharp's violent return of a gifted
2 dictionary and Catherine Earnshaw's rending of a book from its bind-
3 ing as she throws it into a dog kennel, represent more than just the
4 triumph of the pleasures of the novel over older, more respected, genres.
5 In these instances the rejection and attempted destruction of reference
6 works and theological texts are figured as rebellions against restrictive
7 intellectual ideas (especially as applied to female readers). However,
8 while Thackeray's novel goes on to celebrate the anarchic reader,
9 Brontë's return to the notion of book destruction in the final chapters
10 of *Wuthering Heights* appears worried at just how vulnerable texts are to
11 vengeful mishandling. Catherine's library is particularly vulnerable as it
12 is famously 'select'. This essay concludes by examining images of book
13 destruction associated with the most well-known circulating library of
14 the period, Mudie's Select Library. Mudie's is often negatively associated
15 with the 'ephemeral' nature of mid-Victorian print culture, but these
16 essays celebrate texts destroyed – 'read to death' – by subscribers as signs
17 of the successful operation of the machinery of distribution.

18 *Vanity Fair* was published in monthly numbers between January 1847
19 and July 1848. The first chapter contains two episodes which represent
20 the use and abuse of books. This novel is, of course, famous for the
21 range of different readers and audiences invoked by the narrator, but
22 it begins by targeting a specific minority audience – the gentleman
23 reader perusing the monthly number in his club.⁴ Thackeray imagines
24 that his text will be rejected by 'Jones, who reads this book at his Club'
25 because the latter 'admires the great and heroic in life and in novels'.
26 Thackeray's 'novel without a hero' is not for this kind of reader who is
27 warned to 'go elsewhere'.⁵ Nicholas Dames has argued that Thackeray
28 was 'perhaps uniquely obsessed with the imagining of the consumption
29 of his own work'. Dames's reading of this passage and its accompanying
30 illustration (also by Thackeray) contrasts Jones's striking of 'a reading
31 attitude', in which he aims to display a 'distanced attention from the
32 text that he reads from behind an almost literally upturned nose', with
33 the absorbed 'raptly attentive' reader often depicted by Thackeray with
34 his or her head buried in a book and thus screened from our inspec-
35 tion. Dames points out that both rapt and dismissive reading practices
36 are frequently criticised by Thackeray, the one for inattention to the
37 world outside the text, the other for its inattention to the text itself, so
38 that we must not think of Jones's "bad reading" – distracted, distanced,
39 unable to focus for long' as diametrically opposed to a 'good' attentive
40 reading.⁶ Indeed, Garrett Stewart has argued that Thackeray's image of
41 Jones is 'like a fun-house mirror in which you resist recognising the

1 image of your own readerly impatience'.⁷ This embedded reading of the
 2 text itself follows a particularly sentimental passage describing Amelia
 3 Sedley's final preparations before leaving her boarding school for the
 4 last time which is designed to test any reader's patience – "Amelia,
 5 when I write to you I shall call you Mamma" (p. 8) – at the same time
 6 as it sets up the text as the opposite of masculine heroic fiction. Of
 7 course, many contemporary readers would have been excluded from
 8 self-identification with Jones in class or gender terms and may well have
 9 recognised him as a stock figure from Douglas Jerrold and Thackeray's
 10 attacks on Club life which had appeared in *Punch*.⁸ In this context,
 11 Kate Flint's suggestion that Thackeray 'employs a variety of strategies'
 12 to ensure that that it is impossible to interpret this and other scenes of
 13 embedded reading 'in an identificatory manner' is useful.⁹ However,
 14 this interpretation of the novel as one that – in the end – privileges male
 15 over female readers ignores the way in which such moments allow the
 16 reader to drift away from 'absorption' in the text. In Dames's phrase,
 17 Thackeray's 'instantiating of the reader means permitting her to escape
 18 from the fiction'.¹⁰ If Jones must 'go elsewhere' to find the masculine,
 19 heroic, texts that he prefers the reader is also forced to consider the limi-
 20 tations of the female novel that Jones's appearance disrupts. In other
 21 words, Thackeray employs Jones to prevent the reader from becoming
 22 too comfortably absorbed in Amelia's narrative while at the same time
 23 using him to represent the resisting reader who drunkenly attacks the
 24 text with his pencil:

25
 26 Yes; I can see Jones at this minute (rather flushed with his joint of
 27 mutton and half-pint of wine), taking out his pencil and scoring
 28 under the words 'foolish, twaddling', &c, and adding to them his
 29 own remark of '*quite true*'. (p. 8)

30
 31 Jones's abusive treatment of the material text has been given little
 32 attention in recent readings of this scene. Both Stewart and Dames note
 33 that he is writing in the margins using the words ('*quite true*') that the
 34 text dictates, but it is also worth considering the context in which this
 35 reading takes place. Thackeray's phrase 'Jones who read this book at his
 36 Club' suggests that he is adding his marginal comments to a text that
 37 is owned by the institution to which he belongs rather than to his own
 38 personal copy. His reading attitude is thus one that wants to leave its
 39 mark on the page in order that other readers who pick up this text will
 40 note the words underlined – 'foolish', 'twaddling', 'ultra-sentimental' –
 41 and reject the text on generic grounds.

1 That Jones engages in adding to the margins at all is a sign of his anar-
 2 chic behaviour. William Sherman has argued that ‘the cult of the clean
 3 book’ – especially when it was an institutionally owned book – came to
 4 dominance at around the same time that Thackeray began his career
 5 as a writer.¹¹ Thackeray’s own books preserve his genial and delighted
 6 marginal notes and his contemporary, Charles Dickens, used the essay
 7 ‘Our English Watering Places’ to celebrate the discovery of an old com-
 8 mercial library in which the books were ‘thickly studded with notes in
 9 pencil’, but Jones’s annotation methods appear aggressive.¹² Although
 10 his choice of pencil suggests his words could be removed, his method
 11 of highlighting by ‘scoring’ is designed to do lasting damage to the text
 12 that cannot be erased. Indeed, in the visual image that accompanies this
 13 passage Jones appears to be using something that resembles a knife –
 14 rather than his pencil – to keep the text open. Of course, such tools were
 15 necessary for dealing with uncut pages but the image seems to empha-
 16 sise Jones’s violent attitude towards the text. Jones’s attack on the text
 17 is important because although most of Thackeray’s audience had little
 18 in common with the inebriated club bore, his violent misreading of the
 19 text is represented not only as a *legitimate* response, but (in Dames’s
 20 terms) also allows the actual reader a moment in which to pause and
 21 assess his or her own attitude to the novel in the light of a scene that
 22 foregrounds gender and class.

23 The second instance of book abuse in the first number of *Vanity Fair*
 24 occurs when Becky Sharp celebrates leaving the school she detests by
 25 flinging a copy of ‘Johnson’s Dictionary’ out of the window of the car-
 26 riage carrying herself and Amelia away from this institution. Given to
 27 Becky just moments before by the ‘ultra-sentimental’ ‘kind creature’,
 28 Miss Jemima, the book lands at that latter’s feet after she has ‘retreated
 29 into the garden, overcome with emotion’ and ‘almost’ causes her to
 30 ‘faint with terror’ (p. 10). That this act startles Jemima out of her sen-
 31 timental reverie and into a very different kind of ‘emotion’ – anger –
 32 which allows her to leave a significant gap in her description of Becky
 33 that is easily completed by the reader (she is an ‘audacious –’), suggests
 34 parallels between this scene and the embedded reading of Jones. Both
 35 are images of rebellious (non-)readers, book abusers, whose physical
 36 attacks on the material text are activated by Thackeray’s placing of
 37 generic signals associated with the sentimental novel. The visual image
 38 that accompanies this episode also suggests that Jemima’s feelings of
 39 terror are justified. Rebecca is depicted looking straight at her and the
 40 book – frozen in mid-air – seems destined to hit her squarely in the
 41 stomach. However, despite the terms in which Thackeray’s narrator

1 refers to Miss Sharp – ‘Nobody cried for leaving *her*’ (p. 10; emphasis in
2 the original) – it is clear that we are meant to admire her obvious intel-
3 ligence (she deliberately uses her perfect accent to annoy the School’s
4 non-French-speaking head teacher) which is emphasised by her ridding
5 herself of an unsuitable gift in this dramatic and vengeful fashion.

6 Andrew Miller has noted that the episode with the dictionary ‘is the
7 exception that proves the rule’ as far as Becky’s consumption of gifts
8 is concerned. Throughout the rest of the novel she ‘privately receives
9 objects with demure gratitude’ and ‘displays them for public apprecia-
10 tion’ because ‘they contribute to her effect’.¹³ The dictionary is thus ripe
11 for return for a number of reasons. Miss Pinkerton ‘invariably presented’
12 (p. 5) a cheap (‘two-and-ninepence’ (p. 6)) edition of this text to depart-
13 ing scholars and has thus deliberately snubbed Becky by not handing
14 her one when she leaves, whereas Amelia has been given a copy with
15 a personalised inscription. Becky’s destruction of the book is thus both
16 an attack upon Miss Pinkerton (whose ‘reputation’ and ‘fortune’ (p. 5)
17 are based on a distant connection to Johnson) and her sister, who
18 mistakenly believes that Becky will be ‘miserable’ (p. 6) if she doesn’t
19 receive the same gift as Amelia. To return the book in this way is thus
20 to attack both sisters in an outrageous fashion, but it also suggests
21 that Becky is already beginning to think about how the objects that
22 she owns can be used to ‘contribute to her effect’. A dictionary, which
23 is referred to in the arch tone of the narrator as an ‘interesting work’
24 (p. 5), is hardly likely to help Becky construct the flirtatious persona
25 that she goes on to develop as a mode of survival.

26 Indeed, Becky is frequently associated in subsequent episodes of
27 embedded reading with the manipulation of books as objects. In
28 Chapter Ten, for example, she finds favour with the children of the
29 Crawley family by allowing them access to the library put together by
30 one of Lord Crawley’s disgraced forebears while at the same time pre-
31 tending to cultivate an interest in Crawley’s ‘books of a more serious
32 tendency’ (p. 109). Although Becky is said to help the children with
33 their reading, Thackeray’s illustration shows her two charges discover-
34 ing something truly shocking (perhaps pornographic?) in the pages of
35 a book lying on the library floor, while she sits in front of a portable
36 writing desk, preoccupied with her own thoughts. In such scenes Becky
37 is associated with stereotypical fears about the effects of novel reading
38 upon single women and the unsupervised reading of children, whereas
39 her destruction of the dictionary seems to celebrate the triumph of the
40 novel over the learned texts of the past. Leah Price has argued that real-
41 ist novels (and histories of reading which often follow the *Bildungsroman*

1 model) often privilege an idea of reading in which individuals are
 2 'shaped by books' that they have stumbled upon by chance. Such an
 3 idea promotes reading as a 'transgressive force' and as such any book
 4 received from a teacher or parent – like Jemima's gift to Becky – tends
 5 to be depicted as an object that needs to be rejected or destroyed.¹⁴
 6 Thackeray's interruption of his novel by scenes, often accompanied by
 7 illustrations, in which readers reject institutionalised texts (bought for
 8 the Club library, gifted by the School) can thus be read as promoting a
 9 liberal politics of the autonomous novel-reading subject who may, if he
 10 or she wishes, stop reading altogether. However, Jones's violent scoring
 11 of the page and Becky's terrifying return of Jemima's gift do not simply
 12 promote reading as a process of 'auto-enlightenment' that is opposed to
 13 'forced reading'.¹⁵ Becky's immediate return of the dictionary and her
 14 'transgressive' (non-)reading of the Crawley library suggest that she is
 15 particularly adept at understanding the symbolic function of texts (as
 16 gifts, as objects of display, and as containers of appropriate opinions).
 17 Returning the dictionary is to rid herself of a book that will not add to
 18 'her effect', but as with Jones's imagined rejection of Thackeray's own
 19 text, this attempt to destroy the text is seen as a legitimate response to
 20 a disciplining authority.

21 It has long been recognised that images of books and readers play an
 22 important role in *Wuthering Heights*.¹⁶ It is Catherine Heathcliff who
 23 introduces a book to the narrative during Lockwood's first visit to the
 24 Heights in 1801 when she takes a 'long, dark book from a shelf' in order to
 25 threaten the servant, Joseph, with her skills in the black arts.¹⁷ It is typical
 26 of Lockwood's lack of skill as a narrator that he fails to identify this text,
 27 although Catherine's subsequent reading of it by candlelight suggests it is
 28 a novel rather than anything more sinister. It is in the following chapter
 29 that Lockwood spends part of his enforced stay at the Heights locked in a
 30 room with the remains of Catherine Earnshaw-Linton's library, the con-
 31 tents of which give rise to his 'Gothic' dream of the ghost at the window.

32 Lockwood finds security in Catherine's box-bed, which he describes
 33 as 'secure against the vigilance of Heathcliff and every one else' (p. 15)
 34 and immediately begins to interpret its hidden texts in an episode that
 35 includes several instances of illegitimate book use and two representa-
 36 tions of book destruction. The first of these occurs when Lockwood
 37 falls asleep while reading the graffiti – 'a name repeated in all kinds of
 38 characters, large and small' (p. 15) – that Catherine left scratched into
 39 the window-ledge and his candle falls onto one of the 'antique vol-
 40 umes' (p. 15) that occupy the same space. Having snuffed out the fire
 41

1 which has damaged the text's calfskin binding, Lockwood discovers
2 it to be a cheap bible inscribed "'Catherine Earnshaw, her book'"
3 (p. 16). Catherine is a text that needs interpretation and Lockwood
4 first becomes fascinated with her by reading the fragmentary reflec-
5 tions written in the margins of the few religious texts that she owned.

6
7 Catherine's library was select, and its state of dilapidation proved it
8 to have been well used, though not altogether for a legitimate pur-
9 pose; scarcely one chapter had escaped a pen-and-ink commentary –
10 at least the appearance of one – covering every morsel of blank that
11 the printer had left. (p. 16)

12
13 This passage resounds with witty references to contemporary print
14 culture. Brontë uses 'select' to refer to both the small size and limited
15 subject matter of Catherine's book collection, but contemporary readers
16 would also have recognised it as a reference to Mudie's 'Select Library'.
17 Founded in 1842, Mudie's commercial circulating library was already
18 famous for the boast that only 'first class' novels made it onto the
19 shelves at the time of Brontë's writing, and her readers would also have
20 known that the Library's subscribers were asked not to add their com-
21 ments to the margins of the books they borrowed.¹⁸ It was, of course,
22 'legitimate' to write in the books that one owned and this passage sug-
23 gests that Lockwood at first assumes that Catherine has added a 'com-
24 mentary' to a religious text (which may itself have featured a printed
25 marginal gloss). However, like Catherine, Lockwood is a disobedient
26 reader, preferring Catherine's annotations to the 'legitimate' printed
27 text, which when he finally begins to read its 'red ornamented title',
28 immediately sends him to sleep (p. 18).

29 The second image of book destruction in *Wuthering Heights* is
30 described by Catherine in her illegitimate additions to the end pages
31 of the *Pious Discourse*, supposedly written by Brontë's creation Jabez
32 Branderham, over which Lockwood snoozes.¹⁹ Having been forced to
33 read 'good books' by the servant Joseph, who has already made them
34 suffer a three-hour sermon, Catherine and Heathcliff rebel by taking out
35 their anger on these texts:

36
37 I could not bear the employment. I took my dingy volume by the
38 scroop and hurled it into the dog-kennel vowing I hated a good book.
39 Heathcliff kicked his to the same place.
40 Then there was a hubbub!

1 'Maister Hindley!' shouted our chaplain. 'Maister, coom hither! Miss
2 Cathy's riven th' back off "Th' Helmet uh Salvation", un Heathcliff's
3 pawsed his fit intuh t' first part uh "T' Broad Way to Destruction!".'

4
5 The level of violence meted out against these texts is extreme.²⁰ Catherine's
6 taking of *The Helmet of Salvation* by its 'scroop' is a deliberate attempt to
7 destroy its binding so that it cannot be read again and Joseph's sugges-
8 tion that Heathcliff has kicked 'into' ('pawsed his fit intuh') his 'good
9 book' also suggests a deliberate attempt to do the text as much damage
10 as possible. That this event is also accompanied by a verbal curse ('vow-
11 ing I hated a good book') and that the final destination of these texts
12 is the low space of the dog kennel, also registers just how transgressive
13 this act of rebellion actually is. Like Becky's throwing of the dictionary
14 out of a carriage window, Catherine and Heathcliff are not only return-
15 ing unwanted gifts, but attempting to destroy, to desecrate texts that
16 embody forms of authority.

17 Perhaps the most surprising thing about this description of book
18 destruction is how much sympathy Brontë allows us to have with the
19 rebels. Lockwood begins to read this episode in Catherine's marginalia
20 because it begins with 'an excellent caricature' (p. 16) of Joseph, whose
21 abuse of Christian sentiments ("The Lord help us!" (p. 2)) have punc-
22 tuated the narrator's visit to the Heights since the moment he arrived.
23 That the sanctimonious Joseph operates as a brilliant caricature of a spe-
24 cifically *Calvinist* hypocrisy may be one of the reasons that Lockwood
25 fails to condemn the destruction of these religious texts. Indeed, his
26 own dream of Branderham's endless sermons suggests a suspicion of all
27 forms of extreme non-conformity, but we are also sympathetic towards
28 Catherine and Heathcliff's act of destruction because it is a rebellion
29 against tyranny and hypocrisy. Throughout Catherine's marginalia,
30 Joseph is represented as completely obedient to her brother, 'the tyrant'
31 (p. 16) Hindley, who enforces the children's reading of both 'Prayer-
32 books' and the 'good books' that they destroy while he and his wife do
33 'anything but' read 'their Bibles' (p. 16). The hint of sexual impropriety
34 is clearly a deliberate contrast to the curiously asexual relationship
35 between Catherine and Heathcliff. The servile nature of Joseph's obe-
36 dience to the class system is mocked by Brontë via his inadvertently
37 comic cries to his 'Maister' about the nature of Heathcliff's destruction
38 of *The Broad Way to Destruction*. That Joseph only bullies those that have
39 no power helps to legitimate an act of destruction that at once offends
40 Joseph's Calvinist sensibilities (the books are presumably Calvinist
41 tracts) and his sense of the social order (the books are Hindley's property

1 as the head of the house and once belonged to the latter's God-fearing
2 father).

3 Like Thackeray's images of book abuse in *Vanity Fair*, Chapter Three of
4 *Wuthering Heights* draws attention to the book as a material object (with
5 a back to be broken and margins to invade) and reading as a material
6 act (which involves cutting the pages, or that can be enforced rather
7 than voluntary). Of course, the only person actually doing any reading
8 in this chapter is Lockwood who also consciously avoids the letter press
9 of Catherine's religious books in favour of their novelised margins. As
10 Garret Stewart has argued, Lockwood later pays to *hear* the remainder
11 of the 'tortured story' upon which he had 'accidentally embarked' while
12 reading in the margins and although he turns the 'story' into a novel
13 it is its orator / narrator, Nelly Dean, that is the text's most voracious
14 reader.²¹ It is Nelly who is familiar with the contents of the Grange's
15 library – in which much of the tale is told – rather than its former
16 owner, Edgar, who (Nelly tells us) used to 'shut himself up among books
17 that he never opened' in order to avoid contact with Catherine (p. 106).

18 Like Thackeray, Brontë conceives of book abuse as the ultimate form
19 of resisting reading. In part, the desecration of authoritative texts by
20 Lockwood, Catherine and Heathcliff symbolises the triumph of the
21 novel over other (more respectable) genres such as the guide to salva-
22 tion, but the connection of book destruction to characters whose other
23 rebellious acts are ambiguously represented also suggests that the repre-
24 sentation of book abuse activates authorial anxieties about the reader's
25 lack of obedience. Lockwood is, of course, a notoriously bad reader, mis-
26 interpreting the nature of the Heights when he first arrives by reading
27 it as an idyllic domestic space, in which Catherine is an 'amiable lady'
28 (p. 9) surrounded by her 'favourites' (p. 7), rather than the nightmarish
29 world of domestic tyranny that is in fact revealed during his stay. In
30 other words, he misreads the gothic as domestic realism in the novel's
31 opening chapters and remains emotionally distanced from Nelly's nar-
32 rative, enjoying it as pure story, rather than as a sympathetic or active
33 responder who might intervene. If Lockwood's reading of Catherine's
34 narrative in the margins of Branderham's *Pious Discourse* rather than the
35 letter press signals the triumph of the novel over this older, more seri-
36 ous, genre, his unsympathetic reaction to Nelly's tale is a warning to the
37 novel's actual readers that such tales need to be read carefully. Brontë's
38 work thus suggests that not only is the novel more thrilling than the
39 reading of 'good books' that it replaces, but if interpreted correctly, also
40 more effective in moral terms. As Dames has suggested in the context
41 of Thackeray, scenes of reading in multi-plot fiction tend to emphasise

1 that this is the form of reading best suited to the modern capitalist
 2 world in which readers are encouraged to exercise choice (including the
 3 choice not to read).²² However, Brontë seems more attuned to produc-
 4 ing attentive readers than Thackeray. The novel concludes by placing an
 5 idea of shared reading at the heart of a new, domestic narrative.

6 Both Becky's angry return of the dictionary and Catherine's rending
 7 of the "'back off "Th' Helmet uh Salvation"' are presented in context
 8 as legitimate subversive activities in which the decision not to read
 9 deliberately flouts rules associated with patriarchal and class-based
 10 repression. Book destruction is, however, only legitimate under such
 11 circumstances. Later in the same chapter of Brontë's novel, the mature
 12 Heathcliff threatens the young Catherine Heathcliff with violence if she
 13 doesn't stop reading her 'trash' (p. 25). This derogatory term suggests a
 14 novel, which she throws safely into a chair in an echo of her mother's
 15 rebellious launching of a religious text into the doghouse. This echo
 16 resounds again when Lockwood's narrative is revived at the novel's
 17 conclusion. He learns that Heathcliff has 'destroyed' Catherine's books
 18 leaving her with 'no materials for writing, not even a book from which
 19 I might tear a leaf' (p. 266), and witnesses Hareton's burning of some of
 20 the books that he has stolen from her. That 'Mr Heathcliff never reads'
 21 and denies Catherine even the 'select' library that Hindley allowed
 22 to her mother, indicates that he has become a version of the 'tyrant'
 23 described in the margins of the *Pious Discourse*. Catherine is reduced
 24 to surreptitiously scouring the house for books and it is her teasing of
 25 Hareton about his struggles in learning to read using some of the texts
 26 that he has stolen from her that leads him to cast them into the fire.
 27 Lockwood is typically passive during this event, making no effort to
 28 save the books from the flames, despite his suggestion to Catherine that
 29 he would be 'desperate' without reading materials (p. 266). Although
 30 the novel is clearly critical of his passivity, the idea of reading as a form
 31 of mental liberation that Lockwood is said to 'read' in Hareton's 'coun-
 32 tenance' (p. 268) as he destroyed these texts is not questioned. Indeed,
 33 when Lockwood returns to the house after a year's absence he witnesses
 34 the next stage of Hareton's education in a scene which celebrates both
 35 the book as gift and the power of reading to transform the individual.
 36 Catherine's presentation of a book full of 'costly pictures' (p. 280) almost
 37 instantly alters Hareton's appearance and behaviour – 'all his rudeness
 38 and all his surly behaviour had deserted him'(p. 279) – in a chapter that
 39 suggests the next generation may achieve the domestic harmony denied
 40 to their parents through shared reading. That on her departure for the
 41 night Catherine leaves a book 'upon the chimney-piece' for Hareton

1 suggests that reading is likely to be at the centre of the marriage that
 2 Nelly predicts in the final paragraph of this chapter. However, even here
 3 the book is not entirely safe from destruction. Joseph promises to make
 4 any books that Catherine leaves disappear 'intuh th' hahse' never to be
 5 found again, but his attempts to menace the young couple are defeated
 6 by Catherine's own threat to mete out the same fate to his precious
 7 'library' (p. 280). Catherine repeats the trope of book destruction asso-
 8 ciated with her mother's first appearance in the text, but the rebellious
 9 (non-)reader is here transformed into a novel reader, whose shared read-
 10 ing of texts seems destined to set Hareton free from his 'rude' origins.

11 The thrillingly subversive acts of book destruction imagined in the
 12 early chapters of *Vanity Fair* and *Wuthering Heights* return with a mixture
 13 of anxiety and triumph at the end of the latter. Joseph's threat to the
 14 position of the book at the centre of a new, harmonious, domesticity is
 15 ultimately defeated by a reminder of the earlier attack upon his library.
 16 Although we tend to talk about books being 'consumed', they are, of
 17 course, particularly resilient objects and in almost all of the incidents
 18 discussed in these novels it is likely that they would have survived to be
 19 read again. Only in Hareton's burning of Catherine Heathcliff's library
 20 are the books actually destroyed, consumed by the flames. Brontë's
 21 reluctance to actually finish off the text in all except for this instance,
 22 when the destructive act (we are told) goes against the perpetrator's best
 23 interests, suggests that even in an author who imagines some texts as
 24 symbols of repression (Joseph's 'good books' are 'lumber') there is often
 25 an anxiety about book destruction. Books survive in *Wuthering Heights*
 26 not only because the disembodied act of reading has the power to lift
 27 individuals (like Hareton) out of their social origins, but because indi-
 28 vidual copies of material texts are also imagined as repositories of emo-
 29 tion. Catherine Heathcliff describes her books as 'consecrated to me by
 30 other associations' (p. 267) and her mother's books preserve her feelings
 31 in the margin. If Lockwood's candle had indeed destroyed the pages of
 32 the *Pious Discourse* he could not have become fascinated with her life.

33 As already noted, Brontë describes Catherine's library as 'select' as part
 34 of a joke on contemporary print culture. Commentators on mid-Victor-
 35 ian print were fascinated by Mudie's Select Library which was often used
 36 to symbolise a world overburdened with printed objects. These commen-
 37 taries take a different approach to book destruction than those outlined
 38 in the two canonical novels that I have been discussing. For example,
 39 Andrew Wynter's tour of Mudie's for the journal *Once A Week* seems to
 40 positively delight in finding out what happens to books 'exhausted' by
 41 Mudie's subscribers. Haunted by the death of the text, Wynter's tour

1 takes him into 'the vaults' where books not 'as yet considered dead' are
 2 stored alongside those that are 'utterly past and gone'.²³ However, even
 3 here he offers a tantalising glimpse of resurrection as in yet another
 4 room 'books out of demand are being made up for sale' (p. 705) to cir-
 5 culate again in other libraries before they finally rest at peace. Even the
 6 kind of violence meted out to Joseph's books in *Wuthering Heights* can be
 7 salvaged by Mudie's team: 'broken backs and torn leaves are treated in an
 8 infirmary' (p. 705). Only those books 'read to death', and thus 'too dirty'
 9 and 'too greasy' to be sold as wastepaper, are sent to the 'charnel house'
 10 (p. 705). This image of the turning of 'thousands of [dead] volumes' into
 11 'manure' becomes a curious celebration of the success of the circulating
 12 library in supplying 'knowledge'. Wynter notes that 'food for the mind'
 13 will now help feed 'our bodies' (p. 705). In an article that celebrates the
 14 circulating library as 'the machinery' that allows 'a bountiful supply of
 15 [author's] works to be distributed' throughout the nation (p. 706), dirt,
 16 grease and destruction are the signs of a satisfied mass audience. That
 17 books become 'exhausted', or are 'read to death' during this process is
 18 thus seen by an author writing for a periodical text aimed at a mass
 19 audience as evidence of the successful turning of the machine of circula-
 20 tion. Figures relating to the multiple copies of individual titles taken by
 21 Mudie's are multiplied to indicate the number of hands through which
 22 a book has passed. The 3,250 copies of Livingstone's *Missionary Travels*
 23 (1857), chosen by Wynter because of its appeal to multiple audiences,
 24 are said to have been 'circulated' to 'not less than 30,000 readers' (p.
 25 706). Enough volumes of Livingstone have survived their travels to
 26 make a wall of Mudie's hall glow green with their spines, and it is this
 27 combination of books that have returned 'exhausted' with those 'read to
 28 death' that Wynter uses to symbolise the difference between the 'whole-
 29 sale' style of distribution that characterises modern print culture and the
 30 'well-thumbed' but quickly 'fossilised' stock of a circulating library in the
 31 days before Mudie's 'transformation' of the business of renting books (p.
 32 705). Book destruction through use is thus made a key image in Wynter's
 33 celebration of the commodified, circulating text.²⁴

34 Of course, the destruction of fashionable circulating library novels
 35 is not always figured in this fashion. The article 'Recent Novels: Their
 36 Moral and Religious Teaching', published in the *London Quarterly Review*
 37 in October 1866, imagines that the books of 'the season' will first add
 38 to the 'groaning shelves of Mr Mudie' before meeting the 'demands of
 39 the trunk-maker and cheesemonger'.²⁵ Where Wynter imagines books
 40 being 'read to death', this article represents them as being 'skim'-read in
 41 large numbers by an audience for whom they provide 'almost' the 'sole

intellectual food', and the celebration of the 'machinery' of distribution is replaced by a fear about 'the wide extent of area' that popular print culture in the form of the novel now reaches (p. 100). Wynter's confidence that the books on Mudie's shelves provided a satisfying mental diet, and that once read, either went on to be recycled by other libraries or turned into 'manure' to provide food for the body, is undermined in this instance by an anxiety about the 'affect' of 'inferior' fiction on those not of the 'highest class' of mind (p. 100). This article seems to suggest that such texts are never really anything more than wastepaper and that their eventual fate, lining trunks and wrapping food, is only temporarily delayed by the skimming reader.

Criticism of the 'sensation fiction' of the 1860s often draws attention to the text as a material object – a commodity produced under factory conditions – in order to undermine its legitimacy as a cultural artefact. In Henry Mansell's 'Sensation Novels', published in the *Quarterly Review* in April 1863, this kind of text is consistently associated with the circulating library and referred to as an 'ephemeral' form that, 'aspiring only to an ephemeral existence', seems constantly to threaten to turn into wastepaper.²⁶ The review of the little-known novel *Misses and Matrimony* (by Capt. W. W. Knollys) published in *The Athenaeum* in January 1865 begins with a series of jokes about the material form of the book that playfully takes up this notion of the circulating library novel's lack of durability. *Misses and Matrimony* is referred to as just 'a tale' because unlike the 'bona fide novel' it consists of only one volume, rather than three, and is not 'bound in boards strong enough to endure for at least one season the wear and tear of a circulating library'. The circulating text is here associated with an 'external' material strength that allows it to 'endure' being 'thrown into and tumbled out of Mr Mudie's boxes' as it is transported into the hands of subscribers scattered throughout the nation. By contrast, Knollys's tale, 'feeble in the back and paralytic in the sides', would not 'outlive' a week of such treatment. This weak-bodied individual would quickly be 'read to death'. Indeed, the text is almost destroyed by the reviewer's own reading that leaves the copy bearing 'more resemblance to a pile of old bills than to a volume of printed literature'. This book's outer weakness and inner 'strength' is contrasted with those delivered by Mudie's, where 'weakness within' is said to be of 'less importance' to the distributor than a strong binding. However, this article isn't just a glib condemnation of the durability of books built to circulate, as the 'strength' of Knollys's work seems to have more in common with the immoral 'hot and strong' sensation texts that Mansell's essay for the *Quarterly* associates with circulation.²⁷

1 *Misses and Matrimony* is, *The Athenaeum* argues, written 'without a high
 2 purpose' and reiterates the trope of 'the fast young lady' that is a feature
 3 of much sensation fiction. Costing just 12d and lasting for only four
 4 hours before it was 'read to death', this review celebrates a strongly
 5 ephemeral text, in which the author is described as dancing on egg
 6 shells in order to keep the story just the right side of respectability.
 7 Here the idea of a book that dissolves into its constituent parts (via an
 8 economic metaphor that substitutes 'bills' for pages) celebrates a self-
 9 destructing cheap print culture which lies outside the disciplining forces
 10 of the 'select' library and the monthly reviews which both see durability
 11 as the guarantor of quality.

12 Given Wynter's fascination with recycling he would undoubtedly
 13 have been pleased to see much of his 1861 article on Mudie's reused
 14 by Hain Friswell in an essay on 'Circulating Libraries' that appeared
 15 in *London Society* in December 1871. After acknowledging Wynter as a
 16 source of many of the facts about the size of Mudie's stock, words and
 17 phrases taken from the earlier essay are worked into Friswell's own tour
 18 of the Library. In a direct steal, Friswell argues that 'popular books,
 19 torn, dirtied, and "read-to death"' are unfit for recycling by the butter-
 20 man and trunk-maker and are instead used 'for manure!' so that what
 21 was once 'food for the mind' is now 'food for the body'.²⁸ However,
 22 where Wynter only invokes the idea of books as wastepaper when
 23 discussing those that have been 'read to death', Friswell dwells upon
 24 the fate of sermons and monthly reviews (such as 'the Quarterly').
 25 Not read enough to be in danger of destruction through use it is these
 26 'good books' that are most at risk of ending up as 'waste paper', rather
 27 than the 'ephemeral' novels condemned by the *Quarterly*. However,
 28 Friswell refuses to privilege the 'good book' over the popular novel
 29 and despite the fact that his subsequent description of the 'hard wear
 30 and tear' handed out to circulating library texts reinvigorates images of
 31 slatternly readers drawn from the previous century, Mudie's 'greasy and
 32 well thumb'd' books are once again made to symbolise the successful
 33 distribution of knowledge. Most of the damage comes from readers so
 34 eager to get at the text that they use a range of inappropriate tools to
 35 cut the pages:

36
 37 Ladies seem to use knife-handles, spoons, sugar-tongs, butter-knives,
 38 and fingers. 'Lady Slattern has been before me,' says Sheridan; 'she
 39 has a most observing thumb and I believe cherishes her nails for the
 40 convenience of making marginal notes'. Gentlemen cut books, appar-
 41 ently, with pencil-cases, walking-sticks, and the tubes of tobacco-
 pipes! (p. 522)

Essays which consider Mudie's as the most successful commercial library of the age often focus on the book as a material object (securely bound or well-thumbed) and the body of the subscriber as a handler (as much as a reader) of texts. For Wynter and Friswell everything about the material text associated with the circulating library, from the carelessly cut page to the book 'read to-death', could be interpreted as a sign of the success of modern civic society in which objects passing from hand to hand were to be celebrated rather than feared. Perhaps not surprisingly one of Friswell's other images of modernity is of the circulation of letters via the Penny Post. Despite the presence of 'Lady Slatern' in his account of the library Friswell seems surprisingly unconcerned by the 'many dirty books' in circulation and the connection between dirt and disease so often made by later commentators on the public library is entirely absent.²⁹ Also missing, however, is the idea that these texts pose a moral threat to their readers. They are 'dirty' but not immoral. Indeed, the brief mention of the free libraries of Liverpool and Salford in Friswell's conclusion suggests that these essays prefigure a later discourse of the public library in which the destruction of books in circulation was read as a sign of what Walter Stanley Jevons termed 'the full accomplishment of their mission'.³⁰

Mid-Victorian authors are fascinated by both the vulnerability and the resilience of the material text. Images of book destruction, either in the form of the violent return of an unwanted text, or the celebration of a text's demise as it is 'read to death' at the hands of circulating library readers, are surprisingly positive. The abuse meted out to texts in early episodes of *Vanity Fair* and *Wuthering Heights* suggests text destruction as a liberating act that shakes off the shackles of enforced reading (especially for women). However, later references to the burning of books in Brontë's novel draw attention to the vulnerability of objects positively invested with memories of earlier reading experiences. Catherine's 'select' library with its autobiographical notes in the margins appears an increasingly unlikely survival as the text progresses. It is perhaps not surprising to find novelists approaching ideas of texts destruction with some ambivalence. By contrast the work of Andrew Wynter and Hain Friswell on the circulating library reveals an unexpected delight in the destruction of texts at the hands of enthusiastic readers that (at least temporarily) opened up a new way of writing about popular print culture.

Notes

1. Leah Price, *How to Do Things With Books in Victorian Britain* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012), pp. 207, 7; Garrett Stewart, *The Look of Reading: Book, Painting, Text* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006).

- 1 2. Price, *How to Do Things With Books*, p. 207.
- 2 3. Price, *How to Do Things With Books*, pp. 47, 73, 70.
- 3 4. The classic account is Wolfgang Iser, *The Implied Reader* (Baltimore: Johns
- 4 Hopkins University Press, 1974).
- 5 5. W. M. Thackeray, *Vanity Fair*, ed. John Sutherland (Oxford: Oxford World's
- 6 Classics, 2008), p. 8. Further references to this edition are given in the text.
- 7 6. Nicholas Dames, *The Physiology of Reading: Reading, Neural Science and the*
- 8 *Form of Victorian Fiction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), pp. 105,
- 9 73–7.
- 10 7. Garrett Stewart, *Dear Reader: The Conscripted Audience in Nineteenth-Century*
- 11 *British Fiction* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996), p. 50.
- 12 8. On 'Jones' and the representation of the 'typical club man' in the pages of
- 13 *Punch*, see *Vanity Fair*, ed. John Carey (London: Penguin, 2001), p. 812 n. 18.
- 14 9. Kate Flint, 'Women, Men and the Reading of *Vanity Fair*', in James Raven,
- 15 Helen Small and Naomi Tadmor (eds), *The Practice and Representation of*
- 16 *Reading* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), pp. 246–62 (p. 261).
- 17 10. Dames, *Physiology*, p. 111.
- 18 11. William Sherman, *Used Books: Marking Readers in Renaissance England*
- 19 (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008), pp. 21, 157–8.
- 20 12. Thackeray's own annotations are considered in H. J. Jackson, *Marginalia:*
- 21 *Readers Writing in Books* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001); [Charles
- 22 Dickens], 'Our Watering Place', *Household Words*, 2 August 1851, pp. 433–6
- 23 (p. 434).
- 24 13. Andrew Miller, 'Vanity Fair Through Plate Glass', *PMLA* 105(5) (October
- 25 1990): 1042–54 (p. 1049).
- 26 14. Price, *How to Do Things With Books*, pp. 72, 163.
- 27 15. Price suggests that 'auto-enlightenment commands more glamour than
- 28 forced reading'. *How to Do Things With Books*, p. 89.
- 29 16. Robert C. McKibben, 'The Image of the Book in *Wuthering Heights*',
- 30 *Nineteenth-Century Fiction* 15(2) (September 1960): 159–69; William A.
- 31 Madden, 'Wuthering Heights: The Binding of Passion', *Nineteenth-Century*
- 32 *Fiction* 27(2) (September 1972): 127–54.
- 33 17. Emily Brontë, *Wuthering Heights*, ed. Ian Jack (Oxford: Oxford World's
- 34 Classics, 1998), p. 12. Further references are given in the text.
- 35 18. On the presence of *Wuthering Heights* in Mudie's collection, see Stephen
- 36 Colclough, 'Reading the Brontës: Their First Audiences', in Marianne
- 37 Thormahlen (ed.), *The Brontës in Context* (Cambridge: Cambridge University
- 38 Press, 2012), pp. 159–66.
- 39 19. It has been suggested that the original of this embedded text may be Jabez
- 40 Burns's *The Pulpit Cyclopaedia* (1844). See Marianne Thormahlen, *The Brontës*
- 41 *and Religion* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), pp. 17–18.
20. Janet Gezari's forthcoming edition of the novel for Harvard notes that Brontë
- may have invented these titles, but that 'The Helmet of Salvation' owes
- something to *Christian in Complete Armour* by William Gurnall (1617–79),
- while 'The Broad Way to Destruction' echoes a passage from the Sermon on
- the Mount often used in nineteenth-century sermons. I am grateful to Prof.
- Gezari for this reference.
21. Stewart, *Dear Reader*, pp. 237–42 (p. 242).
22. Dames, *Physiology*, p. 104.

23. [Andrew Wynter], 'Mudie's Circulating Library', *Once A Week* 5(130) (21 December 1861): 705–6 (p. 705). Further references are given in the text.
24. For an alternative view of the circulating library and the commodity text, see Lewis Roberts, 'Trafficking in Literary Authority: Mudie's Select Library and the Commodification of the Victorian Novel', *Victorian Literature and Culture* 34 (2006): 1–25.
25. 'Recent Novels: Their Moral and Religious Teaching', *London Quarterly Review* 27(53) (October 1866): 100–24 (p. 100). Further references are given in the text.
26. [Henry Mansell], 'Sensation Novels', *Quarterly Review* 113 (April 1863): 481–514 (p. 485).
27. 'Misses and Matrimony. By Capt. Knollys of the 93rd Highlanders', *The Athenaeum*, No. 1941 (7 January 1865), 17; [Mansell], 'Sensation Novels', p. 485.
28. Hain Friswell, 'Circulating Libraries: Their Contents and Their Readers', *London Society: An Illustrated Magazine of Light and Amusing Literature for the Hours of Amusement* 20(120) (December 1871): 515–24 (p. 522). Further references are given in the text.
29. On discourses surrounding public library provision, see Alistair Black, *A New History of the English Public Library: Social and Intellectual Contexts, 1850–1914* (London: Leicester University Press, 1996).
30. William Stanley Jevons, 'The Rationale of Free Public Libraries', *Contemporary Review* 39 (1881): 38–402 (386).

8

Waste Matters: Charles Dickens's *Our Mutual Friend* and Nineteenth-Century Book Recycling

Heather Tilley

That mysterious paper currency which circulates in London when the wind blows, gyrated here and there and everywhere. Whence can it come, whither can it go? It hangs on every bush, flutters in every tree, is caught flying by the electric wires, haunts every enclosure, drinks at every pump, cowers at every grating, shudders upon every plot of grass, seeks rest in vain behind the legions of iron rails. In Paris, where nothing is wasted, costly and luxurious city though it be, but where wonderful human ants creep out of holes and pick up every scrap, there is no such thing. There, it blows nothing but dust.¹

On Friday the Ninth of June in the present year, Mr. and Mrs. Boffin (in their manuscript dress of receiving Mr. and Mrs. Lammle at breakfast) were on the South Eastern Railway with me, in a terribly destructive accident. When I had done what I could to help others, I climbed back into my carriage – nearly turned over a viaduct, and caught aslant upon the turn – to extricate the worthy couple. They were much soiled, but otherwise unhurt. The same happy result attended Miss Bella Wilfer on her wedding day, and Mr. Riderhood inspecting Bradley Headstone's red neckerchief as he lay asleep. I remember with devout thankfulness that I can never be much nearer parting company with my readers for ever, than I was then, until there shall be written against my life, the two words with which I have this day closed this book: – THE END. (September 2nd, 1865)²

1 How do we move from the mysterious fluttering circulation of waste
2 paper in London to the catastrophe of book destruction in Dickens's
3 last completed novel, *Our Mutual Friend* (1864–5)? Both a portion of
4 the novel's manuscript and its author – still to complete six parts of the
5 story – nearly met a horrific end in the 'terribly destructive' carnage of
6 a rail accident at Staplehurst in June 1865. Whilst Dickens's postscript
7 to his novel traumatically replays an undoubtedly terrifying, real expe-
8 rience,³ it also turns on an intimate identification between the writing
9 self and the physical book: an identification that haunts Dickens's novel
10 much like the waste paper haunts the city's enclosed spaces.

11 In this chapter, I trace motifs of book production in Charles Dickens's
12 *Our Mutual Friend*, examining how the formation and deformation of
13 text as a material object in the novel is bound up with the question of
14 authorial identity and literary survival. The novel is intrigued by the
15 impermanency of the material world, dominated topographically by
16 Harmon's dust mounds, which are converted and abstracted into cash
17 and which are also part of a wider literary and textual economy, a shad-
18 ovy emblem of paper recycling and degeneration in mid-nineteenth
19 century London. The opening passage suggests the connectedness of
20 London's dust mounds and waste paper by negatively drawing atten-
21 tion to the way in which Paris's pollution is 'nothing but dust', emptied
22 of other materials by the industry of the city's scavengers, the 'human
23 ants'. In *Our Mutual Friend*, the raw materials of books – paper – and in
24 turn paper's raw materials – rags – are figured through systems of pro-
25 duction, circulation and disposal that move through the topoi of the
26 dust mounds and the paper mill. In this, Dickens's novel draws on con-
27 temporary anxieties and debates concerning the production and man-
28 agement of the nineteenth century's increasingly vast paper archive,
29 connecting as it does rag-pickers to booksellers to waste-paper men to
30 authors in a chain of book production, circulation and destruction.

31 Dickens's fiction is organically shaped by its contemporary material
32 contexts. As Karen Chase and Michael Levenson have compellingly
33 argued, Dickens's interest in the matter London is composed of – its
34 gritty, dusty, muddy depositions and coverings – evidences a 'startling
35 specificity to his engagement with the environment', placing 'the ques-
36 tion of material regeneration in stark and urgent terms'.⁴ Moreover,
37 recent critics have drawn attention to the ways in which *Our Mutual*
38 *Friend* evinces a particular sensitivity towards the way in which the
39 book as material form shapes its readers (or, perhaps more accurately,
40 users).⁵ In my discussion, I will extend these insights by considering
41 how debates over paper and book composition and decomposition are

1 framed in *Our Mutual Friend* as a tension between the possibility that
 2 text might survive and endure future readings, or be turned – return – to
 3 dust. In this, my analysis resonates with Andrew Stauffer's recent discus-
 4 sion of the way in which Dickens imagines, through the motif of dust,
 5 'his own works on paper as inevitably, even tragically, involved with
 6 disintegration and loss' in *Bleak House* (1852–3) and *Our Mutual Friend*.⁶
 7 Whereas Stauffer focuses on the necropolitan library in his discussion
 8 of London as a 'failed library of disintegrating papers and dead letters',
 9 I focus more closely on how more contemporary concerns created shape
 10 and form for this anxiety.⁷ And in conclusion, I will briefly speculate
 11 how this is imbued with particular resonance by Dickens's engagement
 12 in this decade with ideas from evolutionary biology that made the ques-
 13 tion of a form's survival newly fraught with doubt.

14
 15 **Waste matter: the nineteenth-century book**
 16 **and the threat of illegibility**
 17

18 Dickens's novel is deeply preoccupied with the process of reading as a
 19 cognitive act and as a sign of social status. *Our Mutual Friend* explores
 20 repeatedly the processes of reading and value of literacy, notably via
 21 Boffin's employment of the 'literary man' Silas Wegg to read to him;
 22 Charley Hexam's entry into literacy, supported by his sister Lizzie
 23 against the wishes of their father and aided by the schoolteacher Bradley
 24 Headstone; and Lizzie's and Jenny Wren's own literacy lessons, paid for
 25 by Eugene Wrayburn and instructed by Riah. Leah Price argues that the
 26 novel 'obsessively plays the symbolic value of literacy off against the
 27 interpretive challenge posed by nonalphabetic signs'.⁸ This is developed
 28 further by Gavin Edwards's recent discussion of Dickens's later novels,
 29 including *Our Mutual Friend*, in which he shows how the author is
 30 intensely interested in the ways in which the material form of writing
 31 shapes literacy, and in the relationship between cognition and the visual
 32 signifiers of writing, as either script or printed text, concomitant with
 33 Dickens's turn to public reading.⁹ Edwards's discussion draws attention
 34 not only to Dickens's anxiety that a gap may exist between signifier and
 35 signified in reading, but that a text may be constituted of a plurality of
 36 material signifiers upon which meaning is further contingent.

37 The novel's concern with reading and literacy inscribes a doubt as
 38 to the stability of interpretative meaning across and between differ-
 39 ent reading communities (both within and without the text). This
 40 resonates with Catherine Gallagher's identification of the scepticism
 41 *Our Mutual Friend* displays towards new readers, as bad lectors might

1 'mangle, pervert, and destroy any text', notably in the darkly comic
2 scenes between Boffin, who struggles to interpret books beyond their
3 bindings, and his teacher Wegg.¹⁰ Although Gallagher also notes that to
4 counter this the novel 'wants to assure us that vital reading is possible,
5 and that the author's force can be relayed and reused', *Our Mutual Friend*
6 also foregrounds the possibility that the book itself might deteriorate,
7 dissipating the author's vital force beyond the framework of redemption
8 and renewal the novel subscribes to at plot level.¹¹

9 In this, the novel is marked by a constitutive tear between the book's
10 verbal content and material form. This point is noted by Price, who
11 stresses that Eugene Wrayburn's languid listing of the 'critical uses' for
12 which the word 'Reading' is used, conversely highlights that reading
13 is only one of the uses to which books can be put.¹² Price's work more
14 broadly seeks to defamiliarise our notion of the relationship between
15 text and book, as exemplified in her recent study *How to Do Things*
16 *with Books in Victorian Britain*. In a discussion here of paper recycling
17 in Henry Mayhew's *London Labour and the London Poor* (1861) – a text
18 Dickens also drew upon in his depiction of Krook's rag and bone shop
19 in *Bleak House*, 1852–3) – Price writes that considering the end of books'
20 lives in the nineteenth-century publishing and book-selling trades reo-
21 rientates the traditional question 'what is a text?' to 'when is a text?'¹³
22 That is, focusing on the material composition and *de*-composition of a
23 text calls into question its continued legibility by future readers.

24 This anxiety about the text's ability to endure beyond its material
25 form permeates *Our Mutual Friend*, finding particular expression in the
26 novel's central sites of the dust heap and paper mill which, within the
27 novel's ecological system, are connected with paper waste and recy-
28 cling. Mainly comprised of the cinder and ashes from coal (used in the
29 manufacturing of bricks), the dust heaps that accumulated in suburban
30 nineteenth-century London also housed a variety of other 'heterogene-
31 ous material', as R. H. Horne described it in his 1850 article for Dickens's
32 journal *Household Words*. Horne detailed the detritus that would be
33 sifted by dust workers: vegetable matter, dead cats, bottles. Horne also
34 identified white linen rags as one of the detritus sifted from the mounds
35 that would be washed and sold on to papermakers, signalling the role
36 of the dust mound in Britain's chain of paper and book production.¹⁴

37 The dust mounds in Dickens's novel have a particularly intimate
38 relationship with text: not least in that the first purchases the Golden
39 Dustman Noddy Boffin makes with his new fortune from the mounds
40 is a book: 'eight wollumes. Red and gold. Purple ribbon in every wol-
41 lume, to keep the place where you leave off' (*OMF*, 59) and a lector

1 (Silas Wegg). Boffin himself fears he is too old to 'begin shoveling and
2 sifting at alphabets and grammar-books', metaphorically associating
3 the process of learning to read with the work of the dust mounds (*OMF*,
4 58). Moreover, the embryo of the novel is located in another textual
5 dust heap, as Dickens found and recycled the bones of his story from
6 Horne's article. Horne details how a Mr Waterhouse was pulled from a
7 canal by three dust-sifters, Jem, Peggy and Gaffer, after he attempts to
8 commit suicide following the loss of his title deeds. Revived by the dust,
9 he then recognizes his title deeds contained within a gold frame Jem has
10 discovered in the mound. Grateful to the three sifters, he uses his newly
11 found fortune to purchase them a cottage, and then falls in love with
12 the daughter of the dust mound owner, who agrees to settle on them
13 £20,000 following their wedding: leading to the sale, it is suggested, of
14 the heap in 1848 for £40,000 to Russia, as well as a prompt to Dickens's
15 literary imagination. This story, as Catherine Gallagher points out, illus-
16 trates the mythical power of dust to revive, and provides Dickens with
17 the opposing forces of dust and water as redemptive versus destructive
18 forces which structure the novel.¹⁵

19 However, a more ambivalent attitude towards the redemptive force
20 of the dust mound is inscribed in *Our Mutual Friend* when it comes to
21 the fate of the text. A central part of Dickens's story's drama turns on
22 the rightful way in which to administer John Harmon senior's will and
23 capital: his son is hesitant to reveal his identity when he sees the good
24 uses the Boffins begin to put their inheritance to, and Silas Wegg is
25 determined to unearth a more recent will in which Harmon's estate is
26 left to the Crown in order to blackmail the Boffins. The Harmon inherit-
27 ance has accumulated from dust and waste: the selling on of stuff – the
28 by-products of factories or the left-overs of human activity – which in
29 turn makes new products generating yet more profits. Significantly, one
30 of the activities associated with the waste trade that we can trace in the
31 novel is paper manufacturing: most pointedly signified by the anachro-
32 nistic depiction of the paper mill, where Lizzie Hexam finds work as a
33 supervisor. It is also associated with the flow of the novel's other source
34 of capital: the money-lending agency Pubsey and Co., publicly faced by
35 the kindly Jew Riah, but in actuality operated by the sinister Fascination
36 Fledgeby who takes sadistic pleasure in the effects the punitive terms of
37 his loans have on clients such as Twemlow.

38 Pubsey and Co. deal in rags, and Jenny Wren visits their premises
39 regularly to buy her 'poor little two shillings' worth of waste' to dress
40 her dolls with. Part of Pubsey and Co.'s business (the 'branch' Fledgeby
41 likes 'best') is the buying up of 'queer bills' – that is, the purchasing of

1 bad debts that Pubsey and Co. will force debtors to cash in by setting
 2 punitive repayment terms. The novel connects this to the waste paper
 3 trade, as Fledgeby reflects that half the 'lump' of these bills 'will be
 4 waste-paper', and speculating as to whether Riah can get it at 'waste-
 5 paper price' (*OMF* 420). This association between waste paper and the
 6 capital that fuels the plot resonates in the passage quoted above:
 7 the 'mysterious paper currency' is of course both trash and cash. Whilst
 8 recent critics have drawn attention to the role of the paper mill as evi-
 9 dence of the novel's interest in its own materiality, with Katherine Inglis
 10 rightly arguing that it is a critical site in the novel, the role of Fledgeby
 11 has tended to go unnoticed.¹⁶ Yet Fledgeby's association with the paper
 12 trade, along with the dubious ethics of John Harmon senior, point to
 13 an anxiety about the practices associated with paper manufacture. This
 14 anxiety can be traced in wider cultural discourse, as well as the novel's
 15 own treatment of the stuff that paper makes – books – and is articulated
 16 through the association of the sites of paper mill and dust mound with
 17 death and destruction, as I discuss below.

18 The paper industry was under particular stress during the period in
 19 which Dickens conceived of and wrote *Our Mutual Friend*: as Karen
 20 Chase and Michael Levenson stress, there was a 'British paper emer-
 21 gency' in the middle decades of the nineteenth century.¹⁷ Until the
 22 second half of the nineteenth century and the rise of paper made from
 23 wood pulp, most reading matter was made from old rags, which was
 24 frequently, as Price details, recycled in turn (notably as food wrap-
 25 ping or toilet paper).¹⁸ The rapid expansion of literary output catering
 26 for newly literate masses helped fuel rising demands for paper, which
 27 British manufacturers increasingly found difficult to meet as supplies of
 28 linen rags ran low. Paper manufacturers were increasingly dependent
 29 upon the vicissitudes of foreign markets, reliant upon the import of rags
 30 from Russia, Egypt and continental Europe, with supplies interrupted
 31 by war, or driven up in price by the imposition of tariffs. Writers in
 32 Dickens's journals, *Household Words* and *All the Year Round*, were among
 33 those commenting on the state of the British paper trade. John Capper
 34 anxiously presented concerns about the shortage of certain raw materi-
 35 als, including flax for paper production, in an article entitled 'Waste'
 36 which appeared in *Household Words* in 1854. Here, Capper worries about
 37 Britain's dependence on China and Russia for certain key products –
 38 tea, tallow, flax and hemp – and the impact of the Sino-Russian war on
 39 their supply and relative cost. He notes that whereas there is a 'con-
 40 stant tendency' in manufacturing countries to economise residuary
 41 and waste products, 'there is still a prodigious waste going on in half

1 reclaimed and savage regions [...] Much of this enormous waste goes on
 2 in countries belonging to the British crown.¹⁹ In imperialistic terms,
 3 he outlines the impact of British dependence upon Russia for flax, the
 4 source for linen textiles:

5
 6 Besides linen manufacturers, paper makers and paper consumers
 7 must necessarily suffer from any diminution in the supply of tex-
 8 tile fabrics. For some time past the price of paper has been rising in
 9 consequence of the scarcity of fibrous materials; and, looking to the
 10 present enormous consumption, not only for literature, but for trade
 11 purposes, we shall be quite safe in estimating the future additional
 12 cost of paper for one year, at two millions sterling.²⁰
 13

14
 15 This is particularly galling since an alternative to flax – linseed – has
 16 been produced by the East India Company for several years ‘yet no com-
 17 mercial use is made for it’ even though ‘British India already produces
 18 materials sufficient to feed all the paper mills in the world’.²¹

19 Whilst the consumer benefited from a repeal of taxes on paper in
 20 1861, paper manufacturers continued to voice anxieties about the high
 21 cost of raw materials that might again drive up prices. These concerns
 22 came to a head in 1863, with the publication of *The Rag Tax, the Paper*
 23 *Makers’ Grievance and How to Redress It*. This treatise described the
 24 paper makers as ‘sick’, suffering from a ‘malady’ caused by Political
 25 Economists refusing to intercede in the debates over tariffs imposed on
 26 the import of rags to Britain. Whilst paper could be moved freely across
 27 Europe and America, the cost of the tax on rags led the author to fear
 28 that British paper manufacturers would soon have to transfer their mills
 29 and operations to Europe. Britain, the treatise notes, makes more paper
 30 than it does rags, unlike Europe, which therefore had a surplus of rags
 31 to export (and levy charges on).²²

32 The author of the ‘Paper Makers’ Grievance’ conceptualizes rags,
 33 paper and literature in terms of a circular relationship:

34
 35 Rags and Paper may be said to occupy places in a circle of the follow-
 36 ing description: Civilization invents various and abundant clothing –
 37 the wear of clothing terminates in the production of rags – Rags
 38 are transmuted into Paper – Paper supplies the incessant Press, and
 39 the various activities of the Press sustain and extend Civilization.
 40 Where therefore society is most civilized there will be most Rags for
 41 the Paper Maker, and most demand for his Paper; but it is found that

1 the demand for Paper in such countries is greatly in excess of the
2 supply of Rags.²³

3
4 The production of literature relies on a series of material transmuta-
5 tions: from clothes, to linen, to paper, to Press, materials and manufac-
6 turing processes that are literally represented in the world of *Our Mutual*
7 *Friend* as dust heap and paper mill.

8 During the 1860s, Dickens and his publishers contributed in no small
9 way to this increased 'demand for Paper', as new editions of his work
10 proliferated the international literary marketplace, through serial form,
11 periodicals as well as two- or three-volume book form. By the 1860s, his
12 international celebrity had risen so that Europe, America and parts of
13 Australasia were awash with copies of his works, or bills advertising new
14 editions of his works or promoting new works. *Our Mutual Friend* was
15 subject to an intense advertising campaign by his publishers Chapman
16 and Hall, who printed more than a million 8vo and 16mo bills and plas-
17 tered 'virtually the whole of England with posters', including a major
18 poster campaign in railway stations, buses and steamboats.²⁴ Tellingly,
19 the novel itself associates the practice of poster billing with death and
20 illiteracy, as Gaffer Hexam refuses to learn alphabetic signs but is a
21 'scholar enough' of the police handbills that 'papers' his room, able to
22 identify each sorry narrative by their place on the wall (*OMF*, 31–2).

23 During the period in which Dickens wrote *Our Mutual Friend*, the
24 swelling of the book market with his works showed no signs of abating:
25 a reissuing of the Cheap Edition, marketed as 'the People's *Pickwick*' of
26 Dickens's works in the spring of 1865 sold over 250,000 copies by the
27 end of 1866, before being overtaken by competition from the Charles
28 Dickens edition.²⁵ As Maurice S. Lee writes, Dickens, as author and editor
29 working 'at the forefront of his era's print culture revolution [...] nego-
30 tiated superabundant data and sprawling informational networks'.²⁶
31 Yet a counter-narrative checks these statistics of paper plenitude with
32 anxieties about the question of literary afterlife, precipitated by the toll
33 Dickens's exhausting schedule had upon his noticeably ageing body.
34 Indeed, for the first time a clause was written into Dickens's agreement
35 with Chapman and Hall ensuring them compensation for their £6,000
36 purchase of half-copyright should he die mid-serial.²⁷

37 Dickens articulated this slippage between author's body, coffin and
38 book in a jokey note to his publishers following the success of his
39 first novel *The Pickwick Papers*, appointing William Hall and Edward
40 Chapman his periodical publishers 'until I am advertised in the daily
41 papers, as having been compressed into my last edition – one volume,

boards, with brass plates'. He also 'must own' to hopes that 'Pickwick' will be found 'on many a dusty shelf' long after 'my hand is withered as the pen it holds'.²⁸ In a more sombre tone, his own 'last Will and Testament' composed in 1869 dictated he be buried without pomp or title, desiring no monument or memorial but rather to rest his claims 'to the remembrance of my country upon my published works'.²⁹

These works were having to compete, however, in an increasingly crowded market of fiction, exemplified by the *Our Mutual Friend* advertiser, a typically sixteen-page booklet inserted into the front of each monthly part, and dominated by titles from publishers and booksellers that were available in a range of formats: luxurious illustrated editions (beyond the affordability of the average book-buyer); three-volume novels intended for the circulating libraries; cheap one-volume works for individual purchase. The relationship between Dickens's novel and the library is a particularly suggestive one that I want to briefly explore, as it raises two contrasting metaphoric models for the dust mounds as a site for either disposal or preservation of books. These contrasting models are embodied in the nineteenth-century circulating library, as well as the library collection of the British Museum, both of which prompted concerns about the management (storage, circulation and disposal) of the seemingly sublime mass of texts produced in the period.

The most significant lending library – both in terms of scale and its shaping of the market – was Mudie's, established in 1842 by Charles Mudie. An advert for Mudie's in the first advertiser for *Our Mutual Friend* draws attention to its 23rd year anniversary, noting that it was founded 'to promote the widest possible circulation of the best books in every department of Literature'. Following this, however, is a reminder of what happens to books that fall out of fashion and are removed from Mudie's lists: they are sold on second-hand to owners of 'public or private libraries, merchants, shipping agents, intending emigrants, and others'.³⁰ Although this advert suggests that Mudie's responded to the taste of its readers, in reality it exerted a clear censorial policy with regards to the moral nature of the fiction it selected, as well as economic power over novelistic format. Lewis Roberts usefully examines the way in which the practices, spaces and discourse of Mudie's Select Library shaped the novel's status as a commodity, as well as the way in which it promoted circulation and exchange of the novel above ownership.³¹ Lewis's discussion also details how the circulatory model relied upon the destruction of books. Charles Mudie, responding to charges of cultural philistinism laid against him by authors not selected onto his library's lists, argued that:

1 No library could provide space for all the books that might be writ-
2 ten, and as bad and stupid novels soon die and are worthless after
3 death – no vaults could be found capacious enough to give them a
4 decent burial. The heavy cost of such unremunerative stock would also
5 be greater than any purse could bear.³²

6
7 Books here become organic form, identified not so much as individual
8 lives, but rather as a species, as Mudie continues to defend, in quasi-
9 Darwinian terms, his 'right of selection' which provides a barrier
10 between the public 'and the lower floods of literature'.

11 In turn, the huge quantities of novels purchased by Mudie's needed to
12 be constantly managed 'if the library was to avoid being overwhelmed
13 in a flood of its own making'.³³ This was achieved by reselling, as noted
14 above: a novel would be rebound in one volume and placed in the
15 salesroom. Boffin acquires his first book – 'Decline-And-Fall-Off-The-
16 Rooshan-Empire' – at one such sale (*OMF*, 59). Those books which
17 were not, however, in demand and bought by readers as eager as Boffin
18 required a different type of re-commodification, and were sold as recy-
19 clable material: either torn up and sold for waste paper, or made into
20 manure, to compost vegetables and so, in some way, re-ingested by
21 human users.

22 Countering this model of endless circulation and recycling was
23 the preserving role assumed by the British Museum as repository for
24 all books. As Jim Mussell notes, at the mid-nineteenth century, 'the
25 British Museum stood at the centre of a circulatory network that was,
26 at the same time, the end of circulation'.³⁴ As my discussion of the
27 relationship between the wills and the dust mound goes on to explore,
28 the novel is undecided whether dust acts as an archive, a place of
29 safety for the deposition of texts, or whether the texts it is temporarily
30 custodian of have, like the books in Mudie's collection, a latent ten-
31 dency towards decomposition. Yet even whilst the artefacts carefully
32 preserved in the British Museum might sustain the fantasy 'that the
33 past, nonetheless, could be recovered',³⁵ the growth of information
34 stored in libraries and archives posed new sets of concerns: particu-
35 larly regarding the breakdown of legibility. As Andrew Stauffer notes,
36 'even as it was being produced, the nineteenth-century record over-
37 whelmed readers with its scope'.³⁶ In this, the dust mound becomes
38 a site for the struggle between preservation and disposal, but one in
39 which a text's legibility via its material form is inherently called into
40 question.

1 **Uncovering the will, burying the (N)ovel:**
 2 **the dust heap and the end of fiction**

3
 4 The front cover to the monthly parts of *Our Mutual Friend* links death
 5 and the decline of books. Marcus Stone's illustration depicts books tum-
 6 bling onto a scene in which Wegg reads *Decline and Fall of the Russian*
 7 *Empire* to Boffin, beneath another episode, in which a skeletal figure
 8 of death plays upon the dust mounds (see Figure 8.1). This association
 9 of books with graves is part of the waste paper discourse: in his inter-
 10 views with waste paper men, Henry Mayhew noted how they would
 11 frequently acquire books upon an individual's death, particularly if they
 12 were a type of book that could not be resold: 'an old man dies, you see,
 13 and his papers are sold off [...] that's the way; get rid of all the old rub-
 14 bish, as soon as the old boy's pointing his toes to the sky. What's old
 15 letters worth, when the writers are dead and buried? Why, perhaps 1½d
 16 a pound.'³⁷ In his discussion of media practices of *Our Mutual Friend*, Jim
 17 Mussell calls attention to the metonymic slippage between the media
 18 form of the book, as repository, and the grave.³⁸ In his analysis of the
 19 novel, Mussell suggests that the inscription of the material forms of
 20 media the novel is obsessed with take place within an economy
 21 of death, in which acts of reading and writing have a peculiar power to
 22 reconfigure bodies. Moreover, Mussell writes that 'by including waste
 23 within its broader economy, *Our Mutual Friend* examines the processes
 24 through which material is made meaningful, as well as the status of
 25 whatever is left over'.³⁹ We might also invert this model, and think of
 26 the way in which Dickens identifies books themselves as organisms that
 27 follow a particular life-cycle and indeed might have the power to haunt
 28 the mounds.⁴⁰ This resonates in the association of books and paper with
 29 death and dying in the novel in ways that recall the challenges of main-
 30 taining the nineteenth-century printed archive traced above.

31 Both the dust mound and paper mill are associated in the novel's
 32 schema with death and funerary remains.⁴¹ The paper mill is a parti-
 33 cularly fraught site, on which Bradley Headstone attempts to murder
 34 Eugene Wrayburn in one of the novel's most disturbing and destructive
 35 episodes. Like the rags in the mill, Eugene is subjected to a pulping and
 36 a 'mashing' by Bradley Headstone, changing form and becoming an 'it'
 37 that 'could not help itself' but which is pulled 'insensible [...] mutilated'
 38 by Lizzie from the river water that supplies the mill (*OMF* 684–5). As
 39 Katherine Inglis points out, this precarious relationship between the
 40 human and the stuff of paper finds a particularly tragic resonance in
 41 the fate of Jenny Wren's father, Mr Dolls.⁴² After receiving payment by

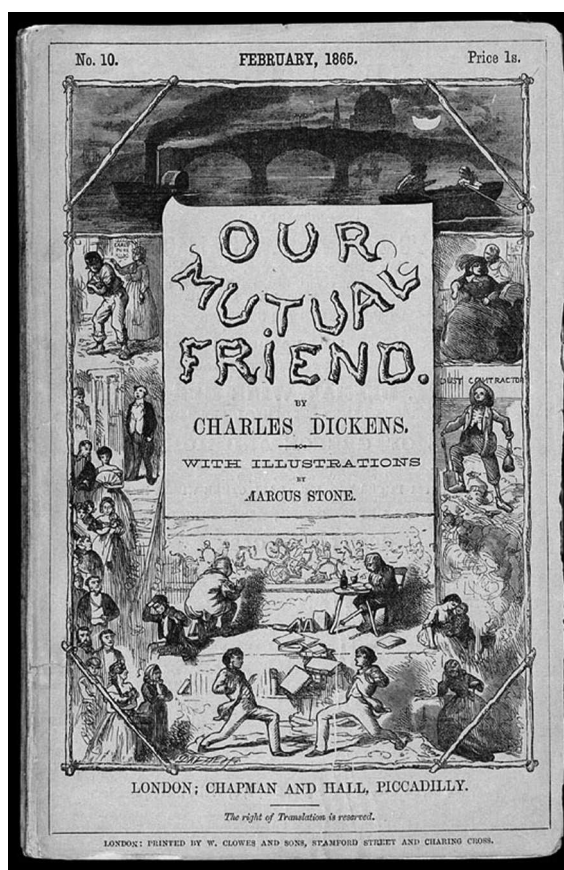


Figure 8.1 Marcus Stone's illustrated front cover to *Our Mutual Friend* (London: Chapman and Hall, 1864–65) (Ada Nisbet Archive, University of California, Santa Cruz)

Eugene for intercepting Lizzie's address at the mill from a letter to his daughter, Dolls, wandering through the scavenger landscape of Covent Garden, in which a 'swarm of young savages' creep off 'with fragments of orange-chests, and mouldy litter', makes his way to the Temple. After spending the shilling given for a coach home by Wrayburn and Lightwood's clerk Young Blight on rum, he proceeds to harangue Blight for more, the act of banging against the door consolidating the 'bloody conspiracy against his life'. Like Eugene, his body begins to change form as he 'convulsively, foamingly' reacts to the police who are called.

1 Laid upon a stretcher, dying, Dolls is ‘rendered a harmless bundle of
2 torn rags [...] with voice and consciousness gone out of him, and life
3 fast going’ (*OMF*, 711). Upon death then, in the scavenger economy he
4 is identified with, Dolls troublingly becomes potential food for the rag
5 supply and in turn for paper, the book, the (N)ovel.

6 Betty Higden’s death on the site of the mill opens out again the
7 relationship between paper and will. Lizzie, returning home from work
8 finds Betty Higden, laid down dying against a tree. When briefly stirred
9 by Lizzie, Betty is keen to draw her attention to a “‘Paper. Letter’” that
10 she keeps in her breast, and which details her acquaintance with the
11 Boffins. Here, Betty distinguishes between the stuff of the text, ‘paper’,
12 and the text itself, ‘letter’. Betty is not, however, author of the letter,
13 which has been scribed by Rokesmith. As Katherine Inglis speculates,
14 Betty’s attachment to this letter could possibly be an insurance against
15 her becoming one of the unclaimed poor made property of anatomists
16 following the Anatomy Act of 1832.⁴³ Yet her earlier detailing of her
17 difficulties in reading hand-writing shows how the visual form of writ-
18 ing determines legibility, but also suggests that a text so determinant
19 of her will is illegible to her. It is only Lizzie’s recent lessons in literacy,
20 aided by Riah, that enable her to ‘read it’ (that is, cognitively process
21 its verbal content) as well as open it, ‘with surprise’ and ‘a new expres-
22 sion and an added interest on the motionless face she kneels beside’ as
23 she recognizes the names which have intersected with her own family
24 tragedy (*OMF*, 505–6).

25 These papery pulpings and deaths are coupled, however, with the
26 strange non-birth of one paper object: the novel. The narrative lists
27 numerous types of texts and genres of writing, including police post-
28 ers, printed ballads, domestic manuals, memoirs of misers, and history
29 books such as *The Decline and Fall of the Russian Empire*. Novels, how-
30 ever, are conspicuous by their absence. On one occasion, Rokesmith
31 presumes that Bella, whom he observes reading as she walks, is absorbed
32 in a ‘love story’ but she corrects his presumptions about the female
33 reader by asserting that it is ‘more about money than anything else’
34 (*OMF*, 204). And one of the only invocations of the novel, Mortimer
35 Lightwood’s alignment of himself with ‘novelists’ as he tells the story
36 of ‘the man from somewhere’ to the Veneerings’ dinner party, is signifi-
37 cantly associated with oral, rather than printed, narration (*OMF*, 25).

38 This can be connected back to the anxious debates around literacy
39 that the novel probes. Catherine Gallagher notes how ‘unlike *Hard*
40 *Times*, *Our Mutual Friend* contains no advertisements for popular
41 entertainment; instead of recommending its own power to revive the

1 flagging energy of the people, the later novel apparently distrusts their
 2 very desire for literacy and breeds suspicion that readers, especially new
 3 readers, will be incapable of bringing the text back to life'.⁴⁴ Gallagher
 4 perceptively identifies a deconstructive, nihilistic energy in the novel
 5 that runs counter to its investment in the power of redemption embod-
 6 ied in Eugene Wrayburn's survival of his injuries (and which can be
 7 traced back to R. H. Horne's article which mythologised the redemp-
 8 tive power of dust). This finds material expression in the burial of the
 9 Harmon wills in the dust mounds, and the attempts to bring them to
 10 light.

11 The Harmon wills have a reciprocal relationship with both text and
 12 dust. The first will "found", as Mortimer Lightwood tells the eager
 13 audience of Society, is dated soon after the young John Harmon leaves
 14 England. This document itemizes the dust mounds, verbally summa-
 15 rized by Lightwood as the "lowest of the range of dust-mountains, with
 16 some sort of a dwelling-house at its foot, to an old servant who is sole
 17 executor, and all the rest of the property – which is very considerable –
 18 to his son" (*OMF*, 26). On the event of his son's death, all of the prop-
 19 erty goes to the Boffins. Whilst Harmon "directs himself to be buried
 20 with certain eccentric ceremonies and precautions against his coming
 21 to life", he is clearly concerned about the terms of his legacy, stipulat-
 22 ing that his son can only inherit his fortune if he marries Bella Wilfer.
 23 In this, he gets his will: although on different terms to what he had
 24 anticipated.

25 As the will names the dust mounds, so other, newer wills are buried
 26 in the dust mound, one of which effectively disinherits the Boffins by
 27 leaving them only the Little Mound, and bequeathing the rest to the
 28 Crown. This is found by Silas Wegg, now ensconced in Boffin's Bower,
 29 who, 'to beguile the monotony of a literary life' hunts amongst the dust
 30 mounds, and comes across a 'paper' contained within a small cash-box,
 31 labelled 'MY WILL, JOHN HARMON, TEMPORARILY DISPOSED HERE'.
 32 Buried in the mounds for safe-keeping, the box keeps the will temporar-
 33 ily safe. But outside of a proper archive, the fragile paper is in a precari-
 34 ous position, as Wegg suggests cutting it in half to Venus (who notes,
 35 however, that "it wouldn't do to mutilate it", *OMF*, 489). Discovery of
 36 this will affords Wegg a sense of entitlement over the property of the
 37 dust mounds, as he reveals to Venus that he plans to supervise their
 38 removal, and make sure that no treasures are removed without his
 39 knowledge. It is only at the novel's climax that the paper is revealed
 40 to be worth 'nothing' as Boffin had also found a still later, and final,
 41 will, which he himself then buries in the dust mound as, by leaving the

1 entire fortune to the Boffins and ‘excluding and reviling’ Harmon’s chil-
 2 dren, Boffin feared a slur would be cast on their memories. Here then,
 3 it is the illiterate Boffin – to whom all print is ‘shut’ (*OMF* 57) – who
 4 acts as archivist, able to both catalogue and interpret the detritus of the
 5 mound and identify John Harmon senior’s final will not by its verbal
 6 content, but by the form of its storage medium (the Dutch Bottle).
 7 Boffin’s urge to bury the will is connected to his desire to destroy it: the
 8 young John Harmon angrily telling Wegg that it was Boffin’s intention
 9 “‘that it should never see the light; but he was afraid to destroy it, lest to
 10 destroy such a document, even with his great generous motive, might
 11 be an offence at law’” (*OMF*, 767).

12 This anxiety about the permeability of the will’s storage medium
 13 is emphasized in Wegg’s recitations of passages from biographies of
 14 misers, one of the literary genres to which the novel affords greater
 15 attention. Boffin pores over these stories, scouring booksellers for new
 16 material, in his attempt to demonstrate to Bella Wilfer the corruptive
 17 power of money. This requires Wegg – engaged in his own programme
 18 of hunting through the ‘secret hoards’ of the dust mounds – to nar-
 19 rate the tale of how the miser Daniel Dancer buried one of his ‘richest
 20 escreteires’ in a ‘dung-heap in a cowhouse; a sum but little short of
 21 two thousand five hundred pounds was contained in this rich piece
 22 of manure’. Dickens held copies of some of the books Wegg reads aloud
 23 from, including the six-volume *Kirby’s Wonderful and Eccentric Museum*
 24 [...] (1820), from which he draws the story of the ‘Singular discovery
 25 of a will, lost twenty-one years’. This “‘most extraordinary case’”,
 26 which Boffin is keen to hear read again after getting the bookseller to
 27 read it to him, and which he identifies as belonging to volume four,
 28 details the machinations that follow the death of Robert Baldwin, in
 29 which his fortune is bequeathed to his eldest son after he lies that
 30 his father ‘destroyed’ his will. After the son executes a will disinherit-
 31 ing one of his own sons, his other son breaks in to his father’s desk
 32 with the intention of destroying that will, only to find the will of his
 33 grandfather, preserved all that time (*OMF*, 478–9). These instances
 34 reveal that will – which can be connected to the author’s vital force –
 35 can only be enacted through the fragile material mediums of ink and
 36 paper, preserved by boxes and desks but easily destroyed. As Boffin and
 37 Wegg stare each other down over a story concerning a will’s would-be
 38 destruction, read aloud amongst the detritus of the dust mound, from
 39 which rags might make paper but in turn paper might be deposited
 40 and decay – we feel the fragility of the novel as narrative imprinted on
 41 such matter.

1 Catherine Gallagher identifies a preoccupation amongst nineteenth-
 2 century authors as to whether they can stay alive through their work:
 3 this concern about the permanency of the will, as a textual document,
 4 is intimately associated with the question of authorial legacy by the
 5 ageing Dickens.⁴⁵ The will is a piece of paper inscribed with words
 6 whose authority is conferred by a signature, analogous to the signifi-
 7 catory function performed by the author's name. It also stands in for the
 8 nineteenth-century Novel, as the various and complex searches enacted
 9 in *Our Mutual Friend* for the final will inscribe a scene so ubiquitous to
 10 Victorian fiction to be a central characteristic of the genre. Suggestively,
 11 Howard Fulweiler notes that this search in *Our Mutual Friend* unites the
 12 'central concern of the Victorian novel with the chief goal of Victorian
 13 science: uncovering the secret of inheritance'.⁴⁶ In this, the will is inti-
 14 mately linked to the origin of the novel, framed within an emerging
 15 scientific discourse of hereditariness.

16 Indeed, the relationship between the will and the Novel takes on
 17 further resonance when we approach the dust heap as a symbol of
 18 nineteenth-century evolutionary biology. Howard Fulweiler identifies
 19 the analogy between the dust heap – composed like the geological
 20 record of old bones and disparate objects whose position and value
 21 have no meaning, but simply accumulate – with the chief insight of
 22 Darwin's *The Origin of Species*, that 'the accumulation of innumerable
 23 slight variations' is the fundamental condition from which natural
 24 selection brings about change' (61, cites *Origin of Species*, p. 435).⁴⁷ The
 25 will and the Novel might attempt to dictate the conditions of their
 26 future readings, but both are located in environments that favour the
 27 conditions of arbitrariness, rather than design. Dickens conceptualises
 28 the text, then, as matter both in terms of it as a commodity – comprised
 29 of raw materials with particular values and exchange systems – and as
 30 a species, subject to variation, change and decline. In this, whilst critics
 31 have argued that Dickens abjures the implications of Darwinian ideas at
 32 plot level, his material imagination remains haunted by the future lives
 33 that await his books.⁴⁸

34 In her evocative discussion of the dust mounds in Dickens's novel,
 35 Carolyn Steedman argues that dust is opposite to waste, as it is about
 36 'circularity, the impossibility of things disappearing, or going away, or
 37 being gone. Nothing *can* be destroyed.'⁴⁹ Yet with the decomposition of
 38 the book, the legibility of the page – its authorial inscription – is poten-
 39 tially destroyed, even though the surface it is written on may survive
 40 in altered form. Significantly, the concept of decline, dissipation and
 41 degeneration is intimately linked to the fate of books in *Our Mutual*

1 *Friend*, not least in that one of the most memorable named books in the
 2 novel is on the subject of 'decline and fall'. Nicola Bown calls attention
 3 to the way in which the novel is replete with repeated literal and meta-
 4 phorical rising and falling movements, connecting these to the novel's
 5 profoundly Darwinian nature.⁵⁰ Whilst degeneration as a term became
 6 more commonly used from the 1880s onwards and is recognised as
 7 'very much a product of the social and cultural climate of the late nine-
 8 teenth century', it was employed by evolutionary science before that
 9 date, notably in the work of Benedict Morel in France (who had coined
 10 the term *dégénérescence* in 1857), and Cesare Lombroso in Italy.⁵¹ In the
 11 historical sketch appended to the third edition of *The Origin of Species*
 12 (1861) Darwin called attention to Geoffrey Saint-Hilaire's statement in
 13 his 'Life' (1795) that 'what we call species are various degenerations of
 14 the same type'.⁵² In this, whilst the plot might cling more to Richard
 15 Owen's ideas on evolution (as a designed and beneficently ordered
 16 upward progression), the representation of the decline and fall of books
 17 in the novel suggests how Dickens's material imagination resonates
 18 more with the inherent degenerative implications of Darwinian evolu-
 19 tionary biology.

20 Significantly, the relative commercial failure of *Our Mutual Friend* pro-
 21 vided a disappointing signal of the declining form of Dickens's work.
 22 For this novel, Dickens returned to the format of publishing his novel
 23 in 20 monthly one shilling parts, prompted in part by the improved
 24 health of his periodical *All the Year Round* (which no longer needed a
 25 star turn from Dickens to boost numbers). Yet despite 30,000 copies
 26 being printed and stitched for the first number, circulation peaked at
 27 this point and steadily declined during the novel's run: only 19,000
 28 were stitched for the final double number. This was indicative of how
 29 'shilling novels in monthly parts had pretty well run their course',
 30 suitable neither for the lending libraries (they could not be collected
 31 conveniently into three volumes for the lending libraries), nor for com-
 32 muting customers (they were too big), representing also poor value for
 33 money for the average book buyer.⁵³ A more paranoid reading might
 34 suggest a public increasingly sated with Dickensian reading matter. In
 35 *Our Mutual Friend*, the part novel is metonymically represented by the
 36 one-legged Silas Wegg, the literary man who, as Jim Mussell notes, has
 37 become alienated from his parts and longs to be reunited with his tibia
 38 bone, residing in a box in Mr Venus's bone shop.⁵⁴ Like the part novel,
 39 Wegg faces despondency and destruction at the novel's end, violently
 40 gripped by John Harmon and 'shaken until his teeth chattered': offered
 41 only a couple of pounds by Mr Boffin to re-establish his stall, he is

1 instead ignobly removed by Sloppy and, like waste paper, deposited in
 2 a scavenger's cart. Inscribing Dickens's fears about 'THE END' that were
 3 more dramatically confronted in the Staplehurst accident, Wegg – as
 4 both bad reader and bad format – returns to the systems of waste circu-
 5 lation embedded within the novel and which shape its production and
 6 destruction without.

Notes

- 10 1. *Our Mutual Friend*, ed. Adrian Poole (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1997), Bk 1
 11 chapter 12, p. 147. Hereafter referred to in the main body of the text as *OMF*.
- 12 2. Postscript to *OMF*, p. 800.
- 13 3. The postscript was an unusual departure from Dickens's usual practice of
 14 publishing a preface, necessitated by the new two-volume form introduced
 15 by his publishers Chapman and Hall.
- 16 4. Karen Chase and Michael Levenson, 'Green Dickens', in Eileen Gillooly and
 17 Deirdre David (eds), *Contemporary Dickens* (Columbus: Ohio State University
 18 Press, 2009), pp. 131–51 (p. 144). This is in the context of a discussion of the
 19 extent of Dickens's environmentalism.
- 20 5. Leah Price details how reading becomes a by-word for a wide range of inter-
 21 pretative acts in the novel, 'Reader's Block: Response', *Victorian Studies* 46(2)
 22 (2004): 231–43. Ruth Tross alternatively describes the ambivalent attitude
 23 Dickens held towards an increasingly literate readership, as his lack of control
 24 over the reception and interpretation of his narrative 'simultaneously
 25 troubles and excites him as a writer' leading him to associate literacy with
 26 criminality ('Dickens and the Crime of Literacy', *Dickens Quarterly* 21(4)
 27 (2004): 235–47 (p. 236)).
- 28 6. Andrew M. Stauffer, 'Ruins of Paper: Dickens and the Necropolitan Library',
 29 *Romanticism and Victorianism on the Net* 47 (2007), paragraph 6 <<http://id.erudit.org/iderudit/016700ar>> [accessed 20 September 2013].
- 30 7. Stauffer, 'Ruins of Paper', paragraph 1.
- 31 8. Price, 'Reader's Block: Response', p. 231.
- 32 9. Gavin Edwards, 'Dickens, Illiteracy, and "Writin' Large"', *English* 61 (2012):
 33 27–49. Evans focuses particularly on *Bleak House*, *Great Expectations*, *Our*
 34 *Mutual Friend* and *Dr Marigold's Prescriptions*.
- 35 10. Catherine Gallagher, *The Body Economic: Life, Death, and Sensation in Political*
 36 *Economy and the Victorian Novel* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University
 37 Press, 2006), pp. 111–12.
- 38 11. See Katherine Inglis, 'Thomas Carlyle's Laystall and Charles Dickens's Paper-
 39 Mill', *Carlyle Studies Annual* 27 (2011): 159–76 (p. 162); Gallagher, *The Body*
 40 *Economic*, pp. 107–10.
- 41 12. Price, 'Reader's Block: Response', p. 231.
13. Leah Price, *How to Do Things with Books in Victorian Britain* (Princeton:
 Princeton University Press, 2012), p. 219.
14. R. H. Horne, 'Dust; Or, Ugliness Redeemed', *Household Words*, vol. I (13 July
 1850): 379–84 (p. 380).
15. Gallagher, *The Body Economic*, pp. 110–11.

- 1 16. Inglis, 'Thomas Carlyle's Laystall and Charles Dickens's Paper-Mill', p. 161.
- 2 17. Chase and Levenson, 'Green Dickens', p. 145.
- 3 18. Price, *How to Do Things with Books*, p. 219.
- 4 19. John Capper, 'Waste', *Household Words*, vol. IX, no. 220 (10 June 1854):
390–3 (p. 390).
- 5 20. Capper, 'Waste', p. 392.
- 6 21. Capper, 'Waste', pp. 391–2.
- 7 22. The treatise notes that the Continent produced 8lb of raw material per head
8 but only consumed 4lbs of paper per head which required 6lb of raw mate-
9 rial to produce (leading to a surplus of 2lb) whereas Britain made 10lb of raw
10 material but consumed 8lb of paper per head, requiring 12lb of raw material
11 (leading to a deficit of 2lb). *The Rag Tax, the Paper Makers' Grievance, and How
12 to Redress It* (London: Blades, East, and Blads, 1863), pp. 5–6.
- 13 23. *The Rag Tax*, p. 5.
- 14 24. Robert L. Patten, *Charles Dickens and his Publishers* (Oxford: Clarendon Press,
1978), p. 307.
- 15 25. Patten, *Charles Dickens and his Publishers*, p. 299.
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- 18 28. Charles Dickens to Messrs Chapman and Hall, 1 November 1836, in *The
19 Letters of Charles Dickens*, ed. Madeline House and Graham Storey, 12 vols
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- 20 29. 'The Will of Charles Dickens', reproduced as an appendix in John Forster,
21 *The Life of Charles Dickens*, ed. J. W. T. Ley (London: Cecil Palmer, 1928),
22 pp. 857–60 (p. 859).
- 23 30. Advertiser to Charles Dickens, *Our Mutual Friend*, 19 parts (London:
Chapman and Hall, May 1864), I, p. 3.
- 24 31. Lewis Roberts, 'Trafficking in Literary Authority: Mudie's Select Library and
25 the Commodification of the Victorian Novel', *Victorian Literature and Culture*
26 34(1) (2006): 1–25.
- 27 32. Charles Mudie, 'Mr Mudie's Library', letter to *Athenaeum*, 6 October 1860
28 (p. 451).
- 29 33. Roberts, 'Trafficking in Literary Authority', p. 17.
- 30 34. Jim Mussell, '"Scarers in Print": Media Literacy and Media Practice from *Our
31 Mutual Friend* to Friend Me on Facebook', unpublished manuscript, p. 16.
32 I am grateful to Jim for allowing me to read and quote from the draft version
33 of his article, which will be published in 2014.
- 34 35. Mussell, unpublished manuscript, p. 16.
- 35 36. From an article in the *London Daily News*, 15 September 1869 on the growing
36 library collections at the British Museum, which also dreamed of 'machin-
37 ery' to help read all the texts. Quoted by Andrew Stauffer, 'Introduction:
38 Searching Engines, Reading Machines', *Victorian Studies* 54(1) (2011): 63–70
39 (pp. 63, 64).
- 40 37. Henry Mayhew, *London Labour and the London Poor*, ed. Robert Douglas-
Fairhurst (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), p. 173.
- 41 38. Mussell, unpublished manuscript, p. 2.
- 39 39. Mussell, unpublished manuscript, p. 13.

40. Mussell notes how the mounds are haunted, and stand for 'a particularly disordered archive, whose contents are unknown and conditions of recall uncertain' (unpublished manuscript, p. 18).
41. Katherine Inglis notes how Lizzie Hexam, situated at the paper mill, is connected to three deaths and rebirths framed and inflected by rags and paper: Mr Dolls, Betty Higden and Eugene Wrayburn (Inglis, 'Thomas Carlyle's Laystall and Charles Dickens's Paper-Mill', p. 170).
42. Inglis, 'Thomas Carlyle's Laystall and Charles Dickens's Paper-Mill', p. 172.
43. Inglis, 'Thomas Carlyle's Laystall and Charles Dickens's Paper-Mill', p. 171.
44. Gallagher, *The Body Economic*, p. 111.
45. Gallagher, *The Body Economic*, p. 5.
46. Howard W. Fulweiler, "'A Dismal Swamp': Darwin, Design and Evolution in *Our Mutual Friend*", *Nineteenth-Century Literature* 49(1) (1994): 50–74 (p. 62).
47. Charles Darwin, *The Origin of Species*, ed. J. W. Burrow (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1985), p. 435.
48. Bown argues that Dickens's novel stands at some distance from Darwin's work, reading the plot and characters for evidence of the way in which Dickens's imaginative world invests in the abiding faith of love to mitigate the emotional impact of Darwin's vision of the natural world. 'What the Alligator Didn't Know: Natural Selection and Love in *Our Mutual Friend*', *19: Interdisciplinary Studies in the Long Nineteenth Century* 10 (2010): <<http://www.19.bbk.ac.uk>>, 1–17.
49. Carolyn Steedman, *Dust* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2001), p. 164.
50. Bown, 'What the Alligator Didn't Know', pp. 9–10.
51. Sally Ledger and Roger Luckhurst (eds), *The Fin de Siècle: A Reader in Cultural History, c.1880–1900* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 1.
52. Darwin, 'An Historical Sketch', in *The Origin of Species*, ed. Burrow, pp. 53–62 (p. 54).
53. Patten, *Charles Dickens and his Publishers*, pp. 308–9. Despite this, Mudie's and W. H. Smith's did unusually take around 1,300 discounted copies of *Our Mutual Friend* in its two-volume form (available after the final instalment appeared in November 1865): Dickens's reputation still made this a potentially worthwhile investment.
54. Mussell, unpublished manuscript, p. 4.

Proof



Part V
Deforming/Reshaping

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Proof



9

The Aesthetics of Book Destruction

Kate Flint

A book destroyed can be a beautiful thing. It can be dampened, moulded into a new shape, and photographed. It can be folded and pleated. It can be delicately cut into fantastical forms, or chiselled into a solid pistol-shape. In the case of these last three examples, it can then be re-presented in two-dimensional form, as a photographic image. Images of books that have been destroyed through negligence or catastrophe or as the result of acts of war or the nibbling teeth of mice can have, on occasion, their own shocking beauty.

These images compel us to think about a number of questions. What, exactly, is lost when a book is destroyed – and what possibilities are released? What distinction might we draw between the destruction of an individual, named book, and that of an unrecognisable, untitled volume? In what ways is a book an emblem in its own right – of culture, of education, of knowledge, say – and when do its specific seditious, incendiary, morally reprehensible, erroneous contents seem to be what counts? What is the relationship between material form and the significance of the word? In what ways *is* a book still a book without legible words? What, indeed, do we see when we see a book that has been mutilated beyond repair? And when and why might such a sight, such an image, bring aesthetic pleasure, as well as, for some, almost visceral pain? How might we bring pleasure at an artist's altered, remade, transformed volume into some kind of relation with the anguish with which Fernando Báez writes in *A Universal History of the Destruction of Books*, where he aligns his outrage and bereavement in the face of this action with Goethe's pain at witnessing a book burning in Frankfurt, where he saw 'how an inanimate object is punished'.¹

I want to start by considering some photographs of the Detroit Public Schools Book Depository, a spectacular example of waste. These

1 volumes are the victims of neglect. The Depository's interiors have a
 2 horrible beauty to them, ravaged by fires, exposed to the elements, so
 3 that mushrooms grow in the damp ashes of charred and rotted work-
 4 books. James Griffioen is the most prominent and articulate of the pho-
 5 tographers who have returned to this spectacular scene of desolation
 6 over the past 20 years, not just recording the wreckage of textbooks and
 7 teaching materials, but investigating the history behind this long-term
 8 neglected building, once a post office, then used to store books for the
 9 Detroit Public Schools system until a fire – and the water used to fight
 10 it – badly damaged the warehouse in 1987. But many books and station-
 11 ery supplies were left undamaged – never, however, to be salvaged. The
 12 building has been part of a reclusive billionaire's real estate portfolio for
 13 some years now: in depressed downtown Detroit, its demolition and
 14 redevelopment hardly seem imminent.

15 Griffioen ends his investigation of the Book Depository's history with
 16 an apocalyptic prophecy.

17
 18 Here we get to see what the world will look like when we're gone.
 19 We see that the world will indeed go on, and there is a certain beauty
 20 to nature's indifference. Someday the books will tumble from the
 21 shelves at the Bodleian and there will be no one to replace them.
 22 Someday even sooner than that, books themselves may become an
 23 anachronism, like scrolls or cuneiform tablets. It is the book lover,
 24 I think, who is most pained by these images. Even as we sit here at
 25 our computers, we pine for the feeling of pressed pulp between our
 26 fingers. We have a hard time accepting that all our words and knowl-
 27 edge might one day feed the trees.²

28
 29 His photographs are evidence both of catastrophic mismanagement
 30 and waste when it comes to educational resources, and, more gener-
 31 ally, of the ugliness of urban poverty. They have been the prompts
 32 for all kinds of racial ugliness, too. Since their publication, commen-
 33 tators have also chosen to see in them evidence of what happens
 34 when African Americans are empowered and run city government, of
 35 why taxes earmarked for education are wasted, and of why America's
 36 public education system is a failure. One of his most eloquent and
 37 beautiful photographs, of a tree growing in the wreckage of the Book
 38 Depository, has been lifted into a blog called keepitwhite.com, and
 39 labelled 'This is what blacks do with books.' 'And I,' says Griffioen
 40 of his photographs, with just a touch of self-irony, 'just thought they
 41 were beautiful.'

1 These Book Depository images were ones that first caught my eye
 2 some four or five years ago.³ Admittedly, their subject matter makes
 3 looking at them something of a guilty pleasure. When one tries, how-
 4 ever, to account for their appeal on aesthetic grounds – an appeal that I
 5 believe amplifies their polemical power – it can be helpful to turn to the
 6 aesthetics of the ruin. Ever since the contemplation of ruins became a
 7 fashionable aesthetic – and tourist – practice in the eighteenth century,
 8 their attraction has been recognised as profoundly personal. Ruins point
 9 to the end of a lifestyle, the end of a civilisation, the end of dreams of
 10 a future. ‘And for this very reason,’ says Derrida, ‘one loves [the ruin]
 11 as mortal, through its birth and its death, through one’s own birth and
 12 death, through the ghost or the silhouette of its ruin, one’s own ruin –
 13 which it already is, therefore, or already prefigures. How can one love
 14 otherwise than in this finitude?’⁴

15 Reading the Book Depository images through the theory of ruins is
 16 not without its problems, however. In the past couple of years there has
 17 been an explosion of images of the ruins of Detroit, including – but going
 18 far beyond – this particular wrecked site,⁵ and including Julian Temple’s
 19 2010 BBC 2 documentary, *Requiem for Detroit*. In an essay for *Guernica*
 20 magazine, John Patrick Leary responded angrily to this trend, accusing
 21 it of aestheticising poverty without enquiring into its origins, and for
 22 failing to acknowledge the strength of the political and social factors
 23 that are lined up against the isolated acts of resistance that get publicity.
 24 The appeal of the images, he argues, lies in the way in which they stand
 25 for first-world urban decline, making history visible, and representing
 26 our fears about what could happen to our own urban environments –
 27 glimpses of an apocalyptic future. As photographers Marchand and
 28 Mefrre write: ‘Ruins are the visible symbols and landmarks of our socie-
 29 ties and their changes, small pieces of history in suspension’ – a sen-
 30 tence which we should hold in mind for when we return to the appeal
 31 of the single ravaged book.⁶ But without narrative, without contextual-
 32 ising explanation, these images are often little more than what locals in
 33 Detroit call ‘ruin porn’ – in Leary’s words, ‘the exuberant connoisseur-
 34 ship of dereliction’.⁷ Ruin porn – a phrase that makes one feel not a little
 35 guilty in contemplating these images, of course, but which also suggests
 36 a kind of presentism. ‘Ruin porn,’ architectural writer Bryan Finoki com-
 37 ments, ‘is a war on memory, dislocating the political dynamics of ruin
 38 in favor of momentary sensations and lurid plots.’⁸

39 Yet bringing these photographs into dialogue with other forms of
 40 ruined books allows us to do something more active than self-engaged
 41 contemplation at the images of destruction. I am suggesting that we

1 ask *why* it is that images of destroyed books have a particular emotional
 2 effect in the way that, say, a ravaged auditorium may not. If we feel
 3 anger at sheer waste and mismanagement when we see an image of Cass
 4 Technical High School, say – left to be gutted and vandalised by whom-
 5 ever – these pictures still don't have the same, deliberate, visceral pull
 6 of a mouldy, rotting volume. To approach this question, I want to shift
 7 tack, and think about deliberately ruined books. Umberto Eco usefully
 8 described three kinds of 'biblioclasy' – fundamentalist biblioclasy, bib-
 9 lioclasy through neglect, and biblioclasy out of interest.⁹ In relation to
 10 this last category, he specifically has in mind those who pillage volumes
 11 for maps and illustrations, but I want to think about forms that are less
 12 self-interested, more creative, and far more provocative.

13 The history of creative book destruction is a long one. It probably
 14 began with erasures and rewritings on parchment leaves – a tenth-
 15 century volume of Archimedes' *Treatises* was turned into a Byzantine
 16 prayer book in the late twelfth or early thirteenth century. What was
 17 already a unique combination of text and artwork in an illuminated
 18 manuscript could be further adorned by paper-cutting, itself an art
 19 imported to Europe from China, via Korea and Japan. Such altered
 20 books could be exquisitely delicate, as in case of the early seventeenth-
 21 century prayer book that belonged to Marie de Medici and had its
 22 pages cut into the patterns of lace – her favourite costume decoration.
 23 But only occasionally do we encounter a potentially rare volume that
 24 has been transformed – mutilated – for aesthetic ends. A large number
 25 of books that are turned deliberately into artworks have been deemed
 26 obsolete (although there's always the possibility that one person's *objet*
 27 *trouvé* is someone else's irrecoverable object of research). The inclusion
 28 of a pound sign on the front page of Vito Drago's *What I Wanted to*
 29 *Tell You* is less an indication of value (for who can tell when the book
 30 was bought, or if the pencil marking is part of the artwork?) than it is
 31 a further part of the enigmatic postulation about what words, exactly,
 32 were painfully, raggedly gouged out of this work by the artist/author.
 33 Do we understand it as autobiography, as a communication, or as failed
 34 verbal transmission? Or is the work the three-dimensional equivalent of
 35 a dramatic monologue?

36 That pencilled symbol is a tacit reminder of the head-on encounter
 37 between destruction and value when we think about book destruction.
 38 By now, of course, many, if not all of the Detroit books will be out of
 39 date, gently composting under successive bouts of rain and snow and
 40 frost – but this doesn't make their figurative power, *as* destroyed books,
 41 any the less. This power comes from the symbolic valence of books:

1 the way in which we think of them as standing for both learning and
 2 memory, for knowledge, and access to the past. What's more, many of
 3 us have early been taught a kind of reverence for books, encouraged
 4 to treat them not just as objects of material value, but as though they
 5 have some kind of sentient existence, an extension of the thoughts and
 6 emotions they contain. We are exhorted not to bend books back too far,
 7 or to write in them, or tear off the corners and chew them. Keri Smith's
 8 commercially available do-it-yourself project, *Wreck this Journal* – for
 9 people, I guess, who are never going to go out there and be book artists –
 10 depends for its effectiveness on people having internalised this sense
 11 of transgression, and on their looking for mild bilioclastic kicks.
 12 'Crack the spine' – as if killing a living thing – is our first instruction,
 13 before we're told to set fire to a page, to use another page as a target and
 14 throw things at it.

15 Most altered book artists express an articulate awareness about what
 16 they are doing, not just in relation to an individual object of monetary
 17 value, but when it comes to the symbolic value of a book. Su Blackwell,
 18 the creator of extraordinarily delicate book sculptures, notes 'My work
 19 is a lot about transformation. I take an object of value, such as a book,
 20 and de-value it by cutting it up. I then transform it into a "work of art",
 21 turning it back into an "object of value". It's as if I take the familiar
 22 and turn it into the fantastical' – and in this way, she aligns her own
 23 transformative art with the magical plotting that certain books contain.
 24 'I'm interested in the realm of fairy tales and folk legends,' she contin-
 25 ues. 'I externalize the stories from the pages of the book, allowing the
 26 book to read in a "new way".'¹⁰ The fragility of paper works such as *The*
 27 *Last Unicorn* (2012) or *Little Red Ridinghood* (2010) or *Pandora Opens Box*
 28 (2009) is designed to mirror the ephemerality of the fairy world, and
 29 Blackwell adds further touches (reading children; houses illuminated
 30 from within) that bring out themes of immersion and that draw one's
 31 eyes and imagination into the sense of participating in a magical text.

32 But few book artists see themselves as starting from a text that is
 33 potentially valuable (whether in figurative or literal terms). Rather,
 34 they more frequently envisage their work as akin to recycling: making
 35 something out of material that otherwise would be going to waste. They
 36 search for their raw materials in skips, in abandoned houses, at jumble
 37 sales and car boot sales, among library rejects, or buy them, cheap, from
 38 charity shops or second-hand book stores. Jennifer Khoshbin gravitates
 39 to old books 'that will never get picked off the shelves, so I feel I am
 40 liberating them to become something new'.¹¹ Lisa Kokin might appear
 41 to experience little pain in pulping large numbers of self-help books and

1 remoulding them as menacing little boulders in *Room for Improvement*,
 2 nor in mutilating *Mein Kampf*: nonetheless, she has said that when she
 3 takes her craft-knife to a book, she sees the face of her long-dead grand-
 4 father in front of her, reminding her that she's committing the Jewish
 5 equivalent of a mortal sin.¹² A number of artists speak of their distress at
 6 encountering discarded books in the trash – 'I always found that pain-
 7 ful. I still find that painful,' claims Robert The, sculptor of book guns
 8 and other chunky pieces.¹³ The books that The carves – to quote his art-
 9 ist's statement – are 'lovingly vandalized back into life so that they can
 10 assert themselves against the culture which turned them into debris'.

11 The is among those artists who deploys their skill and materials to
 12 ask questions about the process of reading. The volumes that are carved
 13 into the shape of hand guns provoke questions about the relationship
 14 between reading and (metaphorical) violence. Are books – or certain
 15 books – weapons? Do they handcuff themselves to one another, in
 16 a fierce grip of literary tradition; do they imprison the reader, rather
 17 than freeing their imagination? The deliberate reclamation and artistic
 18 redeployment of volumes in order to interrogate the nature of book
 19 culture takes place in numerous other ways, whether these blocks of
 20 pulp are built into large-scale artefacts or individually retooled. Mike
 21 Stilkey builds up piles of recycled books, and paints figures – sometimes
 22 human, sometimes animal, sometimes both – onto them. He creates
 23 gallery and site-specific installations. A number of his pieces are scat-
 24 tered around Rice University library, for example, suggesting, in a place
 25 of learning, the strong links between books, imagination and think-
 26 ing outside of expected paths. What's more, these books hint at an
 27 ambivalence towards the many well-catalogued shelves that surround
 28 them, provoking the idea that the natural world might retake posses-
 29 sion of the cultural – 'this embrace of nature, coming swiftly to bury
 30 the work of man the moment his hand is no longer there to defend it',
 31 as Flaubert, in Egypt, wrote happily in 1846.¹⁴ Stilkey's starting place
 32 of piles of discarded, surplus books makes a statement about waste
 33 and oblivion in their own right. Paul Octavious's gravity-challenging
 34 sculptures, using books to form numbers and dates, point ironically to
 35 the fact that for some interior designers, books are nothing more than
 36 a colour-toned design feature. In similar vein, Jim Rosenau quite explic-
 37 itly took Nicholson Baker's 1995 *New Yorker* article on material manifes-
 38 tations of cultural self-esteem, 'Books as Furniture', as his starting point
 39 for miniature pieces of furniture – constructed entirely from books.¹⁵

40 At the other end of the scale, where just one volume forms the art-
 41 work, Laura Cahill has turned books into vases – a form of recycling

1 that she initiated after discovering that old books are, apparently, hard
2 to recycle because of the glue that binds them, so she felt free to use a
3 band saw to carve them up and wrap them round test tubes. And there
4 are Isaac Salazar's skilled foldings, and, of course, the extraordinarily
5 complex book carving of Brian Dettmer. Dettmer takes solid volumes,
6 often dictionaries or encyclopaedias or medical works of reference, and
7 seals their edges before cutting into them – sometimes he folds or bends
8 or opens them first; sometimes he plans the final shape his work will
9 take, as with five volumes of *The March of Democracy* – arranged just
10 like the Pentagon. Recently, he's been experimenting, in his *Civilisation*
11 series, with making different versions of different copies of the same
12 text. He approaches his task with skills rather like a surgeon's – using
13 an X-acto knife, lifting up a leaf, a sentence with tweezers, employing a
14 scalpel, clamping pieces in place, excising and cutting round the words
15 and images that appear, page by page, and then re-stabilising with var-
16 nish. There's also something akin to wood-carving in his enterprise –
17 he doesn't know, or barely knows, what he's going to encounter as he
18 explores and dissects the books' interiors, working one page or layer at
19 a time, never moving or adding anything. His work is determined by
20 the words and images that he encounters – different native peoples in
21 *The Secret Museum of Mankind*, or indexical illustrations in a Webster's
22 dictionary. Sometimes he begins his excavations from the front, some-
23 times from the side, working around what he finds interesting, excising
24 what he does not.

25 Dettmer is quick to point out that his method of book autopsy is,
26 indeed, closely related to reading, because, he says, 'I don't know what's
27 on the next page when I'm carving through',¹⁶ just as reading is a pro-
28 cess of discovery. Indeed, in a comment recently quoted in the *New*
29 *Yorker*, he's gone so far as to *call* it reading, 'but in a visual and visceral
30 way'¹⁷ – thus problematising what reading *is*, and at the same time
31 blurring the neat taxonomic lines that Johanna Drucker offers us in *The*
32 *Century of Artist's Books*, when she makes a distinction between those
33 that provide 'an experience associated with books themselves', and
34 those that are both more sculptural and more symbolic, that 'function
35 as icons of book-ness or book identity'.¹⁸ Although he doesn't start with
36 a mental picture of what a piece will look like when he's finished, he
37 nonetheless does flip through a volume beforehand, and has some idea
38 of the undertones and the hidden nuances that he wants to draw out of
39 the book's unconscious. An information-filled work can become some-
40 thing like concrete poetry; the contents of a medical textbook can, he
41 says, 'become a metaphor for love and relationships rather than strictly

1 the physical body'.¹⁹ As well as considering a book's potential content,
 2 Dettmer says that material factors are important. 'A book needs to feel
 3 right, it needs to have the right size and paper type. There needs to be
 4 enough diversity and variety. There needs to be a subject of interest with
 5 illustrations or photographs or text.'²⁰

6 Books destined for transformation may be chosen on a number of
 7 grounds, starting with the most basic facts of their constituent parts.
 8 Before soaking, curling, fixing her re-formed books, Cara Barer starts
 9 by looking at her raw material as another kind of sculptor might sum
 10 up a block of stone: 'I am very attracted to its physical properties – the
 11 size, the quality of the paper, whether or not it has only text – is there
 12 any color?'²¹ Sometimes the decontextualised book is rendered com-
 13 pletely unfamiliar, deliberately given a new identity through a title
 14 that channels the spectator's perception, that directs our recognition
 15 of metamorphosis: *Butterfly*; *Shitake*. On occasion, though, the identity
 16 of the original book is instrumental to the artwork itself. This identity
 17 can be generic. The raw material of Barer's *Beach Read* was selected
 18 precisely because it's an example of mass culture, a consumer item
 19 whose substitutional character is signalled through the work's title. All
 20 the same, this kind of book art, despite drawing attention to generic
 21 similarity, transforms a cultural commodity into a unique piece. From
 22 a quite different perspective – one that certainly does not start with
 23 works that have been jettisoned – Carole Kunstadt takes hymn books
 24 and psalmodies from the mid-nineteenth century, and delicately slices
 25 and reweaves them, interplacing gold leaf and transparent tissue paper
 26 in order to reanimate them with a new sacred quality: an act of 'praise
 27 and gratitude' in its own right, she says, before continuing:

28
 29 The disintegrating pages suggest the temporal quality of our lives and
 30 the vulnerability of memory and history. The intended use, as well as
 31 the nature of a psalm as a spiritual repository, implies a tradition of
 32 careful devotion and pious reverence. The physical text evocatively
 33 and powerfully serves as a gateway to an experience of the sacred and
 34 the realization of the latent power of the written word.²²

35
 36 But many other altered books have been chosen with a far more criti-
 37 cal, less worshipful aim in mind, one that implicitly suggests that to
 38 mutilate this particular volume is a perfectly valid act – indeed, a nec-
 39 essary act of protest. In his *Structure of the Visual Book*, Keith A. Smith
 40 notes that the standard mid-twentieth-century textbook, H. W. Janson's
 41 *History of Art*, is one of the works most frequently restructured. This

1 restructuring may be an in-your-face example of generic bibliocon-
2 clasm – and, through exaggerated re-arrangement of the ages, a com-
3 mentary on the difficulty of writing a linear history of art, and asserting
4 a post-modern interplay of styles and traditions instead. It may also be a
5 protest – for Smith himself, back in 1970 – against the fact that photog-
6 raphy was not then included as an ‘art’; or for others, against the under-
7 inclusion of women artists or the treatment of gender more broadly.
8 Ann Fessler’s installation piece *Art History Lesson*, with its altered books
9 offering up an *ALPHABETICAL INDEX of Rape Paintings*, took Janson’s
10 description of the *Rape of the Sabine Women* as its starting point.

11 In a similar, if more playful vein, Scottish artist Georgia Russell has
12 fanned out the words of Ernst Gombrich’s *The Story of Art*, probably still
13 the standard work of introductory art history in the UK. Like her other
14 book sculptures, the feathered pages are imprisoned in acrylic globes,
15 looking for all the world like specimens of Victorian taxidermy. The
16 combination of title and jigsaw pieces in Nicola Dale’s *Telling The Truth*
17 *About History, But Not About The Past* makes a clear statement. Ros Rixon
18 has literalised *Violence in the Arts*, and has liberated the sentences of
19 Herbert Read’s *The Meaning of Art* to suggest how this meaning may loop
20 round, may repeat, may suggest, may never be fully legible – that, cer-
21 tainly, it may not be clearly defined. Other works, like *Some Questions in*
22 *Esthetics*, refuse to be contained within covers any longer: the sentences
23 flow on, unconfined by pages. If all the sentences are removed, Rixon
24 says in her artist’s statement, ‘the book form becomes an empty skeletal
25 shell’, leaving the language itself to flow on, unleashed, and given new
26 meaning by its new incarnation – a practice supported by her quotation
27 from Flaubert: ‘it is impossible to detach the form from the idea, for the
28 idea only exists by virtue of the form’.²³

29 Montana artist Ariana Boussard-Reifel’s *Between the Lines* also seems,
30 at first sight, to be asking an abstract question – what is a book without
31 words? But she also uses this particular work as a graphic demonstration
32 of the fact that some books might be better off without them – indeed,
33 might be better not existing at all. This altered book was produced as part
34 of a 2010 exhibition at the University of Montana’s library that was based
35 on a storage locker full of white supremacist volumes by Ben Klassen that
36 had come into the possession of the Montana Human Rights Network.
37 The Network had been anxious about the legal implications of burning
38 or pulping the books outright, so they sent off some boxed sets – to
39 Holocaust museums, other human rights groups, and so on – and then
40 handed over many more for the making of artworks that would spark
41 discussion about racism, anti-Semitism and intolerance. *Between the Lines*

1 offers one take on the issue, excising every word of a racist text; Boussard-
 2 Reifel and her mother, Dana Boussard, also constructed a 10-by-10 foot
 3 house out of nearly 3,000 of these volumes for a piece entitled *Hate*
 4 *Begins At Home*. In this, we're made to consider how the home is the
 5 ground of early judgement forming; a place where social identity is con-
 6 structed, where hate and intolerance and injustice are learned, and spill
 7 out into the world – as these books spill out into the museum space. Even
 8 the curtains, sewn from book pages, don't contain these attitudes, but
 9 blow outwards. The artists make full use of the black and white valences
 10 of texts and of racial thought. In the video that's part of this installation,
 11 the daughter's (white) body is blackened by words of hate: words that,
 12 as they layer over and over her body, shift from meaning into gibberish.
 13 The idea of a clear racist message promoting whiteness is turned on its
 14 head, and the setting for this is a house made of books.

15 The *Speaking Volumes: Transforming Hate* exhibition sparked off a con-
 16 siderable controversy – at least at a local level – about the relationship
 17 between the transformative art exhibit and censorship. Desecrating
 18 these particular books might seem to us a perfectly reasonable fate for
 19 them, but those on the side of book destruction presumably always feel
 20 that way – that they are justified on political or moral grounds in oblit-
 21 erating not so much the material objects themselves, but the ideas, cul-
 22 tural memory and sense of community that they contain and create. If
 23 these books had not contained inflammatory words, there would have
 24 been no exhibition: the existence of this specific hate-text produced the
 25 artwork. For very many book artists, however, the contents of the book
 26 are less important than the material fact of a volume in its own right. It
 27 is surely no coincidence that there has been a renewed interest in paper
 28 arts in general over the past ten or fifteen years, a rise concurrent with
 29 the rapid expansion in the possibilities for digital transformation. To
 30 transform a book – to slice it, fold it, scrape it, paint or draw on it, chisel
 31 it – is to draw attention to its qualities *as* a book; to assert the pres-
 32 ence of the three-dimensional object. The neat and elaborate sewing
 33 involved in, say, Carol Kunstadt's work, together with her delicate weav-
 34 ings, makes the point about the semantic connections between text and
 35 textile, between matter and material. What is more, a number of artists
 36 working with books go out of their way to emphasise the way in which
 37 their engagement with the book acts as a corrective to the dominance
 38 of digital technology. Barer's project grew, in part, out of her concern
 39 for the ephemerality of books – not just the apparent easy obsolescence
 40 of individual volumes, but, she claims, 'I'm afraid the printed word will
 41 become a rarity, and the next generation will rely on the ephemeral

1 word – the digital kind that only exists through a computer monitor, or
2 a sort of virtual book that can hold thousands of titles.’²⁴

3 In general, even the most mangled, soaked and reshaped book, even
4 if it’s been rendered utterly illegible, still reminds one forcefully of its
5 original form. Indeed, one might argue that the greater the injury it
6 has suffered, the more powerful the appeal to a spectator’s sensory and
7 emotional attraction to the book as a generic object. In considering
8 the transformed book, we seem to have come quite a distance from
9 the scenes of destruction with which I opened. These artworks and
10 installations are exhibited for the most part in gallery spaces, or in
11 the culturally apposite surroundings of university or public libraries –
12 although it’s a quick and relevant jump to draw metaphorical links
13 between the assault on an individual book and assaults on funding for
14 the arts and for public education. But there are other ways of linking
15 together the book that has been casually, wantonly destroyed, or that
16 which has been rendered pulpy and illegible through natural disaster –
17 in other words, where no creative agency has been engaged except in
18 the manner of subsequent record-making – and the book that has been
19 creatively transformed.

20 Returning to the metaphor of the ruin offers some possible approaches.
21 Indeed, drawing comparisons between ruins and books is hardly
22 new. Back in 1796, the French archaeologist Antoine Chrysostome
23 Quatremère de Quincy asked ‘What is the antique in Rome if not a great
24 book whose pages have been destroyed or ripped out by time, it being
25 left to modern research to fill in the blanks, to bridge the gaps?’²⁵ Rather
26 than read the ruin like a damaged book, however, I am suggesting that
27 we read the damaged book like a ruin.

28 Like any ruin, the ruined book works affectively on us in a variety
29 of ways. Some of these are obvious – the potential that any ruin or
30 ruined object has to remind us of the transience of life or matter;
31 or the passing into oblivion – and pulp – of our own publications, or
32 even the decline of book culture. A destroyed book may, of course,
33 legitimately stand for all of the above. But rather, I want to propose
34 a less contemplative, more dynamic approach, and take up the call
35 that Svetlana Boym has made for a ‘critical ruin gaze’.²⁶ Such a gaze
36 does not look solely towards the past, indulging in nostalgia, yearn-
37 ing after some lost, imagined totality. Rather, it uses the ruin as an
38 opportunity to make us speculate about the relationship between sen-
39 sory perception and speculative thought, about the dialectic between
40 material and digital reality, about the place of the human, and human
41 imagination and creativity, in the face of decay and destruction.

1 Pushed to extremes, a destroyed, transformed book forces us to ask
 2 what, indeed, a book *is*. Hawaiian artist Jacqueline Rush Lee has experi-
 3 mented with different modes of book destruction. Slow kiln firing has
 4 enabled her not to reduce books to heaps of ash, but to create petri-
 5 fied, fragile forms. Immersing one of these in water allows one to see
 6 it slowly decomposing. Death by drowning has been imposed on other
 7 volumes, which are then tightly bound together, their pages showing
 8 like rings of tree growth. What emerges strongly from these images is
 9 their organic quality – not just in the way that they remind us that
 10 paper is composed of soluble wood pulp, taking books back to their
 11 own original material substance, but also their power to suggest books’
 12 anthropomorphic associations – their skeletons, their spines, their
 13 perishability. In her most recent series, she conveys this ephemerality
 14 even more strongly. She takes old books and presses them, face down,
 15 into wet plaster: they leave their imprint, perhaps a couple of threads, a
 16 leaching of dye. Like our memories of books read casually or long ago –
 17 or like books themselves that have been destroyed – what remains is a
 18 trace, a residue, the ruin of a ruin.

19 Christopher Wood opens his study *In Ruins* by calling attention to
 20 the paradox of ruins: that by contemplating them, we are not thinking
 21 about the past, but about our own future. ‘To statesmen, ruins predict
 22 the fall of Empires, and to philosophers the futility of mortal man’s
 23 aspirations. To a poet, the decay of a monument represents the dissolu-
 24 tion of the individual ego in the flow of Time; to a painter or architect,
 25 the fragments of a stupendous antiquity call into question the purpose
 26 of their art.’²⁷ And to a cultural historian, a ruined book represents ...?

27 It’s tempting to leave that question hanging in the air (or to go off and
 28 carve a book into a question mark). But I want to conclude by suggest-
 29 ing that when we contemplate a destroyed book, we’re thinking not just
 30 about its past and present forms, but also about the future of the book.
 31 At the centre of this debate lie more specific issues to do with access to
 32 books, and the archiving of books, and the availability of rare volumes
 33 on-line. If the works that I write about here make one forcibly aware of
 34 a book’s materiality – that a book is a thing, even if it’s not entirely like
 35 other things – by extension they make one think about why one values
 36 this particular object. They compel one to think of the physical aspect
 37 of reading: holding a solid volume, turning leaves, scanning one’s eyes
 38 fast or slow across a page, mining it for pleasure or information.

39 To contemplate the ruin of a book is not necessarily, by any means,
 40 to contemplate the ruin of book culture, however much this may
 41 be invoked in statements made by the artists concerned. Rather, in

transforming the book, these artists give visible shape to what books do to the reading mind. It's because this mind is contained, as yet, in a human body that they make a powerful case for making us consider, at the very least, the means through which the written word is transmitted to us. In making a visceral appeal to our senses of injury and pain; in making us consider the connection between human materiality and the physical matter of the book, they go beyond the creation of sculptures that comment – often wittily – on a whole range of aspects concerning the role of books in our lives. Artists of the altered book help us understand the close connection between flesh and blood, paper and glue, that emanates from our connection with books, as we project human qualities onto them. In return, they help us understand how a damaged, mutilated, abandoned or desecrated book can have such a powerful emotional effect upon us.

Coda

Garrett Stewart's wonderful study of appropriated, mutilated and fabricated books, *Bookwork: Medium to Object to Concept to Art* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011) appeared after I had drafted this piece. Rather than engage with him point by point – tempting though that would be! – I recommend this as essential reading for anyone interested in considering further the topic of books, remediation and objecthood.

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10

Kindle – Recycling and the Future of the Book: An Interview with Nicola Dale*Adam Smyth, Gill Partington and Nicola Dale*

Nicola Dale is a visual artist specialising in paper. She has exhibited nationally and internationally, most recently as part of Manchester Art Gallery's record-breaking national touring exhibition, *The First Cut* (Manchester, Nottingham, Southampton, 2012–14). Nicola has undertaken several commissions for galleries and alternative spaces, including *Between* (Manchester Cathedral and Manchester Mosque, 2013); *Kindle* (John Rylands Library, 2011); *Down* (Liverpool Biennial, 2010); and *Flashback* (Southwell Artspace, 2008). Nicola's work is featured in publications such as *500 Paper Objects* (Sterling, 2013) and *Book Art: Iconic Sculptures & Installations Made from Books* (Gestalten, 2011). She is represented in several collections, including the Tate's artist book archive. Nicola is based at Rogue Studios, Manchester and is an Associate Member of the British Society of Sculptors (ARBS). She is supported by Mark Devereux Projects (<<http://www.nicoladale.com>>).

The following conversation took place on 8 May 2013, at the Djanogly Art Gallery, Nottingham University, where *The First Cut* exhibition was running. The speakers are Nicola Dale (ND), Gill Partington (GP) and Adam Smyth (AS).

AS: Could you introduce the exhibition, and talk about how it started in Manchester, how many artists are in it, and what pieces you're showing?

ND: The exhibition is called *The First Cut*. It's curated by Natasha Howes and Fiona Corridan at Manchester Art Gallery and it involves 31 international artists who work with paper. I got involved about two years before the exhibition first went on show. The curators came to see me in my studios, Rogue Studios in Manchester city centre. They said they really liked my work and they were thinking of doing a show

1 about paper and said they'd be in touch. Eventually they did contact
2 me and commissioned a new piece, which is 'Sequel', and a piece I'd
3 originally done for Liverpool Biennial, called 'Down'. After Nottingham
4 the exhibition moves to the Sea City Museum in Southampton until
5 January 2014.

6
7 AS: So all the artists are working in paper, and this was a big hit in
8 Manchester?

9
10 ND: Absolutely massive, it broke all the records, the most visitors
11 they've ever had.

12
13 AS: Why do think it struck such a chord?

14
15 ND: I think it's the immediacy of it; paper is the first thing you play
16 with as a kid, to make artwork. You screw it up and rip it. It's a good
17 mix of work, some of it is illustrative, and some far more conceptual.

18
19 AS: The first piece we saw was 'Down'. Can you describe it?

20
21 ND: It's a pile of feathers which I've cut from a set of Ordnance Survey
22 Maps from my local library – Withington Library – which couldn't store
23 them any more. They are from the early '70s. It's almost a complete run,
24 230 maps. They sat in my studio for a while until I was approached by a
25 composer called Ailís Ní Ríain¹ who wanted to collaborate with me. She
26 puts music in unusual places and wanted to do something in Victoria Train
27 Station, Manchester, which didn't happen for health and safety reasons ...

28
29 AS: Yes, obviously a very dangerous piece.

30
31 ND: ... but we approached a gallery called Metal, at Edge Hill station
32 in Liverpool, which has transformed all the old station buildings into
33 community space. It's beautiful, lots of exposed brickwork and nooks
34 and crannies, and we exhibited 'Down' in the accumulator tower on its
35 own under dim lights, accompanied by Ailís Ní Ríain music, which is
36 based on found sound elements. It was spooky and spiritual.

37
38 AS: So the piece is a circular plinth and a large pile of what look like feath-
39 ers, but which on closer inspection are pieces of these maps (Figure 10.1).
40 How carefully are you interested in viewers working out this is Eton and
41 Windsor, or Darlington? Is the original text part of the work?



Figure 10.1 Nicola Dale, 'Down' (photo: Artist's own collection).

ND: Definitely. There's always the danger that people will just glance and walk away. The average time spent in front of an artwork is three seconds, but if you spend maybe four seconds you'll notice that they're maps. I did lots of workshops with schoolchildren, and took them to see that piece, and asked them what the feathers were made of. As soon as they knew that they were maps, they got the piece and were telling me what the piece was all about. It is important that people know that they are maps, but you can't force people to look.

GP: You mention that you wanted to convey a particular mood, and you felt that the piece was about loss. Can you elaborate on that?

ND: When I first got the maps, it was sad and upsetting that the library was throwing them away. And when I first looked at them, I thought how much the landscape has changed since the early '70s. These maps are a marker of that change, representing places that don't exist anymore, people that don't exist anymore, journeys that can't be made

1 anymore. That's when I hit on the idea of feathers, since feathers that
2 aren't attached to a bird can't fly anymore. It's a weird sort of celebra-
3 tion of loss, I suppose.

4
5 AS: And when it moves to its new location, will it be to some degree
6 reconfigured and remade?

7
8 ND: Yes, that's something I keep returning to in my work. I'm interested
9 in sculpture that moves and changes. So much of my work is about time
10 and the effects of time, that's why I spend so long making my pieces;
11 the traditional idea of sculpture is something that is static, but I think
12 it's really interesting to work with a material like paper, like books,
13 because it has the capacity to move, and change and take on the shape
14 of its surroundings, even to the extent of taking on a certain plinth or a
15 certain space. I like that it continues its life, even though it's a celebra-
16 tion of something that has gone.

17
18 AS: So do you feel that this piece isn't really 'finished', that it's mid-way
19 through its life?

20
21 ND: Yes, I quite like the idea that it could just carry on. Also, because
22 it's open to the public, I know that feathers are disappearing, and I can
23 imagine the pile getting smaller and smaller as the feathers dissipate out
24 into the world, which I think is so nice!

25
26 AS: So you'd be fine with someone picking a feather off the top?

27
28 ND: It depends who it was ...

29
30 AS: I think Gill has a few in her pocket.

31
32 ND: That's one of the reasons why I like working with these kind of
33 materials; I know that they are going to get damaged, ripped, torn,
34 stolen. That's part of it: I'm not someone who makes work in bronze,
35 that's not what I'm about.

36
37 GP: Have you always been interested in paper? Did you have a fascina-
38 tion with it as a child?

39
40 ND: Right from the beginning. My mum says I used to pull books down
41 off the shelf and build myself a little fortress and sit inside it.

1 GP: So you were interested in doing things with books rather than
2 reading?

3
4 ND: In addition to reading; I loved reading and art, but I went to a really
5 academic school that looked down on Art. I started an English degree at
6 Birmingham, but in the first term realised I'd made a massive mistake.

7
8 GP: That's interesting because your work seems to operate between lit-
9 erature and art, to take books out of one space and put them in another.
10 Do you think that dialogue between literature and art is part of your
11 work?

12
13 ND: I think it must be. It's not uppermost in my mind, but it's definitely
14 in there. Even the work I make that isn't made out of books is inspired
15 by reading.

16
17 AS: So it's important to you to have read the books that you use in
18 your art?

19
20 ND: Not necessarily, it depends on the piece. There was one piece I
21 made where I decided 'I definitely will not read this book'. It was an
22 Albert Einstein book I found in a shop; *The World as I See It*. But my
23 immediate reaction was 'I'll never be able to see the world like Einstein',
24 so I locked it up, padlocked it and threw away the key.

25
26 GP: You made it impossible to read ...

27
28 ND: So that was actually about not reading, but it was very much
29 inspired by that book; it had to be made with that book. It depends
30 on the piece, with 'Sequel', I didn't read all the reference books I used.

31
32 AS: Can you describe 'Sequel'?

33
34 ND: It's a twelve-year-old oak tree, that was felled by a friend of mine,
35 and I stripped all the leaves and replaced them with ones I made from
36 the pages of unwanted reference books from charity shops and library
37 sales. I spent about a year making the leaves and sorting them into
38 categories according the information on each leaf, and when I glued
39 them to the tree I made each branch represent a different branch of
40 knowledge. 'Sequel' is about what's happening to knowledge in the
41 digital world.

1 AS: Is it a political piece in that sense? Are you protesting against or
2 marking the demise of the book?

3
4 ND: I was interviewed by a curator who hit me with a quote from
5 Foucault: 'knowledge is not for knowing, knowledge is for cutting'. She
6 was asking me 'is this about power?' Is this a political statement? I said
7 it's more about power's opposite, it's more about a sense of responsibil-
8 ity to what we have, what we do with the stuff in the world, where
9 it goes, what it means, how it carries on, how we look after it. It isn't
10 overtly political. Once upon a time I thought the disappearance of
11 books was terrible, but I've come to a realisation that you can't fight
12 change or time. Things are going to disappear and there's nothing you
13 can do about it. Nothing that human beings make lasts forever. That's
14 what my work is about.

15
16 GP: There's something open-ended about your work. You produce
17 re-makings of the book, which get re-made and change shape. Your
18 work has a kind of transience built into it; you're interested in the pass-
19 ing of time.

20
21 ND: Definitely, and that's why I keep coming back to handmade,
22 painstaking process. It's a way of feeling time, of being in time. When
23 you're engaged in a repetitive process, cutting and cutting for hours,
24 your mind goes to a different place. I don't know how to describe it.
25 That's why I opted for Art; words didn't feel enough to express what I
26 wanted to.

27
28 AS: That lengthy process of making seems to be very important to you,
29 but when we see it in the gallery we have a different relationship to your
30 work. It seems there are two stages; the process stage, which is more
31 intimate and more your own, and the public viewing stage.

32
33 ND: I'm still not sure if I will try and combine the two things, and go
34 back to more performative work, but the time I spend making these
35 works in my studio is so private. It's hard to translate that into the pub-
36 lic realm; it ends up being about you and the public and not the work.

37
38 GP: You did a performance with a work called 'A Secret Heliotropism' ...
39

40 ND: 'A Secret Heliotropism' is the first altered book work I ever
41 made. I'd been reading Walter Benjamin's *Illuminations*, about the



Figure 10.2 Nicola Dale, 'A Secret Heliotropism' (photo: Artist's own collection)
10.3. Nicola Dale, 'Sequel' (photo: Artist's own collection).

mechanism of history being like a heliotropism. It was such a visual idea, I instantly knew what I had to do with it. It was a painstaking piece: each page was cut by hand into a strand of leaves, but all the strands are still attached to the spine of the book (Figure 10.2). So when you tip the book all the leaves fall out, but you can fold it away and close the cover and it looks like an ordinary book again. Normally that folding away process is private, at the end of a show, but people find it difficult to believe the sprawling mess of leaves and strands can be folded back down. At an artists' book fair in Norwich I showed the piece and spent the second day folding it away in front of people. It took about four hours.

GP: The website for that event said 'come and see Nicola Dale transform this work from sculpture into book'. I was wondering what you thought about the word 'sculpture'. There's something about your work that's transient and delicate, not monumental at all. What sort of terminology do you prefer? Do you think of your work as sculpture or as something else?

1 ND: Well, I do call myself a sculptor, but partly because I don't know
2 what else to call myself. My work is sculptural, it is about form and
3 three-D. But I'm not a traditional sculptor at all.

4
5 AD: Is there a community of paper/book sculptural artists now, do you
6 think?

7
8 ND: I think there is clearly a worldwide trend for books in art, including
9 artists' books and altered bookworks. But the real community element
10 comes from artists' books, which is more about individual books and
11 limited editions that aren't just 'books' but artworks in their own right.

12
13 AS: Why do you think there is that international movement towards
14 paper in art?

15
16 ND: It must be for the same reason that I'm interested in it; there is the
17 sense that these things are passing. Once upon a time, people wouldn't
18 dream of cutting up a book, because they were too expensive, but now
19 they're going and they're ten a penny.

20
21 AS: Tom Phillips talked about the Mallock book he bought, which was the
22 basis of *A Humument*.² He went to a junk shop in Peckham, and bought a
23 book that had to be two pence or three pence. Economy was his opening
24 rule. But can I ask about chance, and the degree to which your pieces are
25 controlled expressions of intention, and the degree to which they're ran-
26 dom. 'Down' looks different each time you install it, and looks like thou-
27 sands of fallen feathers. How much of a role does chance and luck play?

28
29 ND: Loads. I do arrange my pieces but I'm not obsessive about it. But
30 once I've done the cutting, I just let the material be what it is and let it
31 fall where it falls. When I went to Norwich with 'A Secret Heliotropism',
32 they thought it would take a day to set up and a day to put away again.
33 I said, no, setting up is really easy! I can set it up in a couple of minutes.

34
35 AS: I like the idea of the materials having a kind of agency. There's a
36 sense that the book is tending towards some kind of artwork, you're
37 releasing a potential in it ...

38
39 GP : Yes, how do you feel about what you do to books? Are you destroy-
40 ing them? Are you revealing something? Are you bringing out some sort
41 of potential that's in them?

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1 ND: I'm definitely bringing out a potential in them to make people
2 think about them as objects that can be 'read' in a non-traditional
3 way. Reading for me involves not just reading words, but reading form
4 and texture and shape and shadow and light. So there is that potential
5 within the material to let people see that stuff as well. One of the things
6 I love about books is the feel and the weight, and the fact you can turn
7 the pages and you can fold the corners over. It's not just about the
8 words going into your brain, it's about that physicality as well.

9
10 GP: And do you find that you are reading at the same time as you're
11 cutting or re-making?

12
13 ND: Again, it depends on the book. With the reference books when I
14 was making 'Sequel' (Figures 10.3, 10.4), I noticed the colours and forms
15 rather than the words. It was about recognising which pages went in
16 which category. It was thinking about the order of things rather than
17 taking in the information.



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40 *Figure 10.3* Nicola Dale, 'Sequel' (photo: Artist's own collection).



Figure 10.4 Nicola Dale, 'Sequel' (detail; photo: Alan Seabright).

GP: So you were filing things, a filing exercise?

ND: It was a kind of filing exercise, yes. I've always been interested in order. So much of my work is about a set of rules that I make for myself, and then I follow those rules until the piece is made. The technique I use is important to me, because I feel if I'm not true to my own rules then the piece is going to fail. I had to do all the feathers individually, because feathers in nature are all different. If I'd done them on a machine, it wouldn't have been true to the idea.

GP: The painstaking care and time that you take; our collection is called *Book Destruction*, but there's something about what you do that's perhaps at odds with that. I get the sense that there's something you really like about the book as an object, and what you do is somehow honouring them, treating them with affection. How do you characterise your attitude to your medium?

ND: I do almost see myself as a rescuer of books. The maps I used in 'Down', I did rescue them.

1 AS: And the same with the encyclopaedias in 'Sequel'.

2

3 ND: They were destined for the bin. It was a way of giving them a new
4 lease of life. But having said that, I am destroying them. Even though
5 it seems like a painstaking process to spend a year and half making a
6 single piece of artwork, when you think how long the history of the
7 book is, a year and half is nothing. In the long view, to destroy a book
8 in that time is quite a vicious, quick thing to do.

9

10 AS: Have you had any hostile criticism about doing things to books that
11 should be preserved?

12

13 ND: I did a public talk in Manchester, and a librarian spoke to me
14 afterwards. I'd said books were disappearing and she said 'books aren't
15 disappearing!' I don't think she understood. She took it very personally.
16 I don't mean that books will disappear in the next ten years, but going
17 back to the idea of the long view; books will go, everything goes.

18

19 AS: It seems to function on two levels: you have a broader sense of
20 transience of everything manmade passing, and also a local context of
21 libraries closing, and book pulping and digital culture.

22

23 ND: Libraries are changing with the times. In Manchester they are
24 becoming information points. They mirror what computers do for us.

25

26 GP: So, the book's place in culture is changing, but into what? Is that a
27 question you're interested in?

28

29 ND: Massively. The work that I'm doing at the moment is thinking not
30 about individual books but about the fate of knowledge, as opposed to
31 this thing we call information. I'm thinking about the physicality and
32 heaviness of books compared to the weightlessness of digital informa-
33 tion, which is everywhere and nowhere. I'm in the middle of making
34 a new piece using a box of lead type given to me by a neighbour. The
35 first piece I pulled out of the box wasn't a letter, it was a space. I held it
36 in my hand and thought, once upon a time, even a breath or a gap, or
37 a pause in thought had a weight. Now, words themselves are weightless
38 in the digital world. To an artist that's fascinating, because I work with
39 'stuff', but there's all this stuff now that isn't anywhere.

40

41 AS: But you have a very strong digital presence.

1 ND: Yes, I'd be a hypocrite if I said the digital world is terrible. You have
2 to adapt. If it helps to help my work on-line then I will.

3
4 AS: But is that a lesser way of encountering your work?

5
6 ND: There is nothing like seeing an artwork in the flesh. [On-line] you
7 don't get the same sense of weight and form, you don't get the light
8 and shade, or the detail.

9
10 AS: Would you like people to be able to touch your work?

11
12 ND: I don't know. It would be destroyed really quickly. Someone once
13 plunged his hand into the centre of 'A Secret Heliotropism'. He thought
14 it was made of metal.

15
16 AS: We expect artwork to be monumental and permanent, and have a
17 material toughness, so it's very striking to see your pieces when they are
18 so fragile. The leaves move with a breeze.

19
20 ND: Yes, you wouldn't get that sense of movement with an image.

21
22 GP: When does something stop being a book, for you, and start
23 being something else? When you look at a book, do you have an idea
24 of the thing you want to do with it? Do you start with a book, and
25 see where it takes you, or do you start with an idea and find a book
26 to suit?

27
28 ND: I usually start with an idea, and then I seek out the best materials.

29
30 AS: But the maps, and the type were in your studio for a long time as a
31 potential or a future work?

32
33 ND: Yes, things sit in my studio waiting for the idea that's right for them
34 to bring out their potential.

35
36 AS: Is your work conceptual?

37
38 ND: Yes, although it's not what people usually think of as concep-
39 tual art; Michael Craig Martin's glass of water on a shelf. The aes-
40 thetic and the idea are equally important for me, but it starts with
41 the idea.

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1 AS: The stereotype of conceptual art is that it's solely about ideas, and
2 not about the craftsmanship you practice. There seems to have been a
3 return to craft and craftsmanship in art. Are you part of that?

4
5 ND: I suppose I am. I don't think I'm unusual in that. It's a reaction to
6 the YBA [Young British Artists], mass manufacture approach. It is about
7 intimacy and doing it yourself.

8
9 AS: What are the skills you deploy to make a piece like 'Down'? How do
10 you train to do that?

11
12 GP: Have you got an HND in book destruction?

13
14 ND: I think my skill lies in the ideas rather than the craft. It was to do
15 with the degree I did: it trained me to have ideas and think creatively.

16
17 AS: But were you always good at working with your hands?

18
19 ND: I was always making things. I started with making my own edi-
20 tions of books, rather than altering [existing ones]. The first book I ever
21 made was called *Aehimmooprsst*, based on Franz Kafka's *Metamorphosis*.
22 I printed and bound my own book, re-ordering every word alphabeti-
23 cally, but keeping all Kafka's punctuation in place. I wanted to meta-
24 morphose *Metamorphosis*. At the time I was doing a lot of work about
25 re-ordering. I took a piece of classical music and put all the notes in
26 order, from low to high.

27
28 GP: Have you heard of the edition of Freud's *Interpretation of Dreams*
29 published by Information as Material [Simon Morris, *Re-writing Freud*]?
30 It has all the same words, but rearranged in a random order ... There's
31 a lot of wordplay that goes on in your work ... 'Down,' 'Kindle', leaves.
32 Are you interested in these dual meanings? Maybe we could talk espe-
33 cially about 'Kindle', because it seems to invite speculations about the
34 digital and the fate of the book.

35
36 ND: 'Kindle' is an installation, thousands of candles made from the pages
37 of unwanted books (Figure 10.5). The title was obviously a play on words,
38 but I'd read Eco's *The Name of the Rose*, in which a sacred library burns
39 down, and the narrator tries to rescue the fragments. He calls it a 'lesser
40 library', and I tried to create a kind of lesser library with the candles.
41 It was in the Old Map Room in the John Rylands Library, Manchester:



Figure 10.5 Nicola Dale, 'Kindle' (photo: Artist's own collection).

a space with no books, just empty shelves. It seemed a potent place to think about the disappearance of books. I grouped the candles around the room in a secret ordering system, similar the hidden order in the Eco library. I'd come across the compendium of lost words on-line – obscure words that have fallen out of usage – and chose some of those words and made objects out of the left-over book covers that in some way resembled a word. They give clues as to what the word meant but you would never be able to guess it. I was trying to link it to the thought that perhaps in the future people wouldn't know that the candles were made from books, because they would have no idea what books were. I haven't shown it anywhere else because that was the perfect place for it.

AS: It reminds me of a former English literature colleague of mine who said she hated literature, so she had an office with no books in it. Just a single-page photocopy of Freud.

GP: Do you own a Kindle?

1 ND: No. They are quite beautiful objects, but they need power. A book,
2 you don't have to plug it in, you can take anywhere, fold it, write on it.

3
4 AS: So you wouldn't make a piece out of an electronic Kindle?

5
6 ND: Um ... No. I don't think they will have such a long life. Maybe
7 when they're closer to the end of their life, I'll be interested.

8
9 GP: The more we talk, the more it seems like your work is about obsoles-
10 cence, not just the obsolescence of the book, but what it is that books do.
11 Words disappear, knowledge disappears or transforms. Your work is trying
12 to get to this point where language starts to break down or fail or disappear.

13
14 ND: I think that's why I didn't do my English degree. Because words go,
15 and I knew there was another way of expressing that idea. It's a celebra-
16 tion of loss. Not exactly a nostalgia, because it's about moving things
17 on in some way, even if it is only transient.

18
19 AS: Maybe there are two kinds of transience; a bad kind with things
20 getting binned, and a more transformative kind. Are there books
21 you wouldn't cut? One of the things that sparked our interest in
22 this topic is the way that the destruction of religious books can be
23 so explosive.

24
25 ND: My mum was worried I would cut up a Quran, but I'm not inter-
26 ested in causing offence. I'm not the sort of artist who's interested in
27 notoriety.

28
29 GP: Have you ever felt guilty ...

30
31 ND: No. [laughs]

32
33 AS: In general? But is it important that these books aren't wanted?

34
35 ND: Yes. Because it makes more sense to me to use things that aren't
36 wanted. I do have books at home that I would never cut up because I
37 love them too much. But guilt doesn't come into it, because I've never
38 felt like I've destroyed something forever.

39
40 GP: I wanted to talk about 'Flashback', which seems to be about book
41 destruction.

1 ND: It was made specifically for a solo exhibition in Nottingham. It
2 was a while ago, I was slightly more anxious then about books disap-
3 pearing. I'd chosen individual books to represent an area of knowledge.
4 I turned each book into a sculpture of itself on fire. I'd been thinking
5 about Hitler's burning of books in an attempt to get rid of ideas. The
6 books lined the gallery and it had a flickering effect as you walked up
7 and down.

8
9 GP: What about the title?

10
11 ND: It was about looking back to books being everywhere, but also for-
12 wards to a point when they will have disappeared.

13
14 AS: Can you talk about what you're doing at the moment?

15
16 ND: I'm working with the lead type I mentioned earlier. I've been cut-
17 ting very fine tissue paper into rectangles the same size and shape as
18 a piece of type, but making enough of them to weigh the same as the
19 type. It's called *The Weight Between Words*. It's a move away from work-
20 ing with actual books.

21 I'm also doing some work about full stops. A few years ago I carved a
22 book out of stone and left it in the garden, so it got weathered, with
23 moss growing over it. I've been looking at stories about the end of the
24 world, and I'm taking all the full stops out of them. I've got all the full
25 stops from *Revelations* cut out. They will all be threaded onto a string,
26 and they will be attached to the stone sculpture.

27
28 AS: Are most of the pieces you do now commissions, and how much
29 freedom do you have within those? Or are most of the works driven by
30 your own ideas?

31
32 ND: It's a bit of both. People have been very generous with their com-
33 missions. When Manchester Art Gallery approached me, they said 'just
34 tell us what you want to do', they didn't quibble, even when I came to
35 them with the idea of the tree. They said it would be a logistical night-
36 mare, but do it anyway. I've been lucky with commissions, I've been
37 given the freedom to explore things in a way I want. The commission
38 with the mosque and the cathedral, I'm exploring the idea of 'passage'
39 with both groups. I've been to meet them, and been to lots of study
40 evenings and learned a lot about the Bible and the Quran. Originally
41 I thought I would be making a book for each venue, but actually it's

1 turned into something completely different. I'm working now on
2 something that isn't a commission, with a film-maker, Jess Wild.³ It's
3 about the movement of your eyes when reading on a screen compared
4 to reading a book. We started by filming our eyes when reading: when
5 you're reading on a screen your eyes are everywhere at once, they never
6 stay still and there's no regular pattern. Even though text is still linear,
7 there are always things flashing at the side of the screen.

8
9 AS: So that will be a film?

10
11 ND: Yes. It's a bit of a sideways venture, but it's still linked to reading
12 and books.

13
14 GP: A bit of a *Smash Hits* style question, but who or what are your
15 influences?

16
17 ND: Mondrian has always been a big favourite. I don't know if you'd
18 immediately see the link, but I think it's the sense of order and rules.
19 And also Thomas Demand.

20
21 GP: He makes rooms out of paper?

22
23 ND: Yes, a lot of them are 1:1 scale: he recreated Albert Speer's offices
24 in paper. It looks incredibly realistic, but you never see the paper sculp-
25 ture, only the photographic document of it. Also Eva Hess, and Eva
26 Rothschild, but that's about the possibilities of rearrangement, and
27 work taking on different forms.

28
29 GP: Are there influences not necessarily from art, but more everyday
30 practices, things like scrapbooks or pop-up books?

31
32 ND: Not really pop-up books, no, but there's a book by Buzz Spector,
33 which was one of the first artists' books I ever saw. He printed a picture
34 of Kafka on every single page, and then ripped them away in increments
35 so that when you open the book it's a torn image of Kafka.

36 Also, my mum is Polish, and in Poland there's a massive tradition of
37 paper cutting. When relatives would come to visit they'd bring books of
38 paper cuts. They're like the snowflakes you make as a child, but incred-
39 ibly detailed and very delicate, some of them are like lace. I must still
40 have them somewhere. My mum reminded me of it, when she came to
41 the opening of *The First Cut*.

Notes

1. The Irish classical composer and writer Ailís Ní Ríain (<<http://www.ailis.info>>) aims to produce work that challenges, provokes and engages. Her music has been performed at London's Purcell Room, Royal Festival Hall, The National Concert Hall in Dublin, Carnegie Hall, New York and throughout Europe and the USA and featured on BBC Radio 3, BBC 4, RTÉ Lyric FM and RTÉ Television and Channel 4.
2. See interview with Tom Phillips, in Chapter 6.
3. Jess Wild works as a creative practitioner and film maker. The bulk of her creative output has been producing documentaries based on the curious minds of children. She has been recently commissioned to create films documenting the creation of Manchester Art Gallery's exhibitions, such as *The First Cut* exhibition and *The Pre-Raphaelite Experiment*.

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